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**Testimony in Opposition to Bill 7-21**  
**Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools**  
**March 4, 2021**

My name is Jo Shifrin, and I live in District 1. I am testifying in opposition to Bill 7-21, which would maintain the SRO program and keep police in our schools.

Proponents of the SRO program have said that SROs can prevent school-based shootings. However, there is no data that shows police in schools decrease school-based shootings. But there is clear data, both nationally and in Montgomery County, that shows that the presence of School Resource Officers increases the number of school-based arrests of Black and Brown students and those with disabilities. And, despite the fact that there is no evidence that children of different races or ethnic backgrounds exhibit different behavior in schools, Black children are 3 times more likely than white children to be arrested in schools in Maryland, and more than twice as likely as white children to be arrested in schools in Montgomery County.

All of this is very clearly and carefully laid out in the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact statement prepared by the Office of Legislative Oversight with respect to this legislation, including evidence of the impact of SROs both nationally and in Montgomery County. On the specific question of the impact of SRO arrests on race in Montgomery County, OLO reported that “while Black students accounted for 22% of MCPS enrollment, among student arrests in schools between 2015 and 2019, Black students accounted for 47% of all arrests in MCPS schools” and that arrests by SROs accounted for 74% of all student arrests in that period. Although the OLO appropriately stated that its role in preparing the RESJ impact statement is not to tell the Council how to act on legislation, the OLO did conclude: “OLO finds that Bill 46- 20 [which would remove SROs from schools] is likely to enhance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County.” If the Council believes that the RESJ law passed just over a year ago means anything in terms of its effect on the Council’s consideration and action on legislation, this legislation is the prototypical case where it must take the compelling evidence set forth in the impact statement as the basis for its action.

Although many SROs may be good people and provide some students with mentoring, they are still trained as, and act as, police. And because they are trained to enforce the law, they often interpret immature behavior as criminal conduct. Many of these arrests are for things like petty theft, fights, disorderly conduct, or other disruptions, which if they occurred outside of school would become teachable moments between parents and children.

Children need support, encouragement, and education to become well-adjusted adults who can make better decisions because they understand the consequences of their actions. If we want a better climate in our schools, we should take the \$3 million dollars it currently costs for SROs in our County and use it to hire people who are professionally trained to understand child development and to care for the mental wellbeing of children. In turn, they could provide after-school and therapeutic recreation programs, and restorative justice training for Montgomery County Public School educators and staff. It has been shown that when there are trained support staff in schools — such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists — students have higher graduation rates, lower absenteeism, and fewer suspensions.

If you truly want to build positive law enforcement relationships with students, ask law enforcement officers to volunteer, during their off duty hours, without uniforms or guns, after school hours to interact with students in ways that do not involve the threat of punishment in the criminal justice system.

As you make your decision on the future of armed law enforcement in schools, please prioritize data and trusted research over anecdotal support for the SRO program. I respectfully urge you to oppose Bill 7-21. Thank you.

Jo Shifrin