



Testimony on County Policing Bill 7-21—" Police – School Resource Officer – Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools"

Katie Stauss on behalf of Silver Spring Justice Coalition

Silver Spring, Maryland, March 1, 2021

The Silver Spring Justice Coalition unambiguously opposes the effort via bill 7-21 to maintain the program of school resource officers (SROs) in Montgomery County Public Schools, including the attempt within the bill to "fix" a fundamentally broken, misguided, and racist program. The voices of Black and Brown students, students with disabilities and mental health challenges, and students standing in solidarity with their peers, have been raised to demand that police be removed from their learning environment. Our coalition stands solidly with these students in their desire and their need for a school environment that does not include an armed police presence in the hallways or anywhere on campus.

We call attention to the testimony provided from the Collaboration Council on another bill currently before the council (Bill 46-20), which highlighted that the "trauma faced by students of color does not only have to come from their own negative experience with an SRO; it can come from a negative experience with an officer outside of the school building or by simply turning on the news in this county and seeing another person who looks like you murdered by police officers who aren't held accountable."

In addition to the urgency of removing SROs to eliminate this cause of day-to-day trauma from the school environment, the removal of SROs is strongly likely to coincide with a decrease in overall student arrests. National research shows that SROs accelerate and facilitate the school to prison pipeline, with a heavily disproportionate impact on Black and Brown studentsⁱ. Montgomery County is not at all an exception to this shameful and disturbing national trend.ⁱⁱ

Students of color face a disproportionate threat of violence from police in Montgomery County. Black MCPS graduates have even been killed by our county police as young adults. Students are acutely aware of this fact, and they also disproportionately face the harassment and other abuse outside of school that is targeted to young Black and Brown people. The county council has an absolute duty to act urgently to address the overall tragic pattern so students can be safe *everywhere* in our county from police violence, now and in the months and years after they graduate. We expect this ongoing tragedy to be addressed with other bills this year. But in this instance, there is an interim opportunity to take an incremental but important step, to create at least one space that is safer (not fully safe) for students during their school day. It would be unconscionable to miss this opportunity.

For the above reasons, it is beyond evident that SROs should be removed from schools with haste. The idea of students returning now to MCPS as schools re-open, bringing with them the heavy mental burden of the pandemic period, only to be faced with police officers on their campuses, is already a shame on our county in terms of the delay thus far given how long the data has been available. Please vote against Bill 7-21 co-sponsored by Councilmembers Katz and Rice, and please support Bill 46-20 co-sponsored by Councilmembers Jawando and Reimer. Keep police away from students in schools, and then please take the other urgent steps to reduce police presence in our community, including at student events, sports games, and elsewhere throughout the county.

ⁱ “The Presence of SROs in America’s Schools,” Justice Policy Institute, July 9, 2020, at: http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/School_Resource_Officers_2020.pdf

ⁱⁱ “Black Students Make Up One-fifth of County Students, Half of Arrests,” *Bethesda Beat*, June 24, 2020, at: <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/schools/black-children-make-up-one-fifth-of-mcps-enrollment-a-half-of-arrests>