

**Testimony for the Montgomery County Council
March 4, 2021**

**Bill 7-21, Police - School Resource Officer (SRO) - Building Positive Law Enforcement
Relationships Within Schools**

OPPOSE

To: Council President Hucker, Vice President Albornoz, Council Members

My name is Paul Holmes and I am a 28-year resident of Montgomery County. I am affiliated with the Silver Spring Justice Coalition, Jews United for Justice, and the Montgomery County Chapter of the ACLU. I submit this testimony as a concerned individual county citizen and the father of two children who received excellent educations in Montgomery County Public Schools.

I come today to urge Council Members Katz and Rice to withdraw Bill 7-21. Should they choose not to withdraw the bill, I urge the other Council Members to vigorously vote it down.

Thank you to Council Members Jawando and Riemer and to Council President Hucker for introducing and publicly supporting Bill 46-20, which would prohibit the Montgomery County Police Department from assigning School Resources Officers (SROs) in county school buildings. As you recall, the Council Session and Public Hearing on that bill, held on February 4, 2021, put forth a broad array of studies, evidence, data and first-hand testimony, which in its totality was absolutely overwhelming and compelling. Thirty-one of the thirty-three witnesses spoke in favor of the bill. Students, teachers and parents strongly supported the bill. The testimony of students and recent graduates was particularly captivating and convincing. They were Black, Latino, White, LGBTQ, privileged, under-resourced and/or disabled. Some of the witnesses had themselves been victims of SRO misconduct while others stood as outraged allies of those victimized.

Those testimonies are reinforced and supported by a host of national, state and local studies which point to the damage caused by SRO programs and at the same time to a lack of evidence that police presence prevents school shootings or other violence. Most significantly, the Council's own Office of Legislative Oversight concluded unambiguously that Bill 46-20 would "favorably impact racial equity and social justice in the County if funding allocated for SRO's is reallocated to programs that promote students' mental health and social, emotional learning." One would think all this would make passage of Bill 46-20 a slam dunk. But no.

I am astonished that Council Members chose to introduce the competing Bill 7-21 in the face of such overwhelming and pervasive evidence, and the only explanation I can think of is fear. For decades, politicians have been terrified that they might appear soft on crime; that they might be blamed if a vote for reform was followed by a tragic incident. In this case, however, that fear is not real. It is invented. It is a myth, a fantasy. It is a fiction that SRO programs make schools or students safer. The only demonstrated reality is quite the opposite. SRO programs are themselves the greater tragedies by continuing to hurt, and focusing that hurt disproportionately on Black, Latino and special-needs students.

I urge Council members to find the integrity and courage to defeat Bill 7-21. A vote against the bill is a vote for student welfare. A vote in favor of Bill 7-21 is a vote to perpetuate the harm.

Thank you,
Paul Holmes (Silver Spring)