



**Bill 7-21 Police - School Resource Officer -
Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools
March 4, 2021 – Public Hearing**

Good evening President Hucker, Vice President Albornoz and members of the Montgomery County Council. I'm Jud Ashman, Mayor of Gaithersburg - and here to provide testimony on behalf of the City.

School Resource Officer (SRO) Bill 7-21 would do two things:

- Keep school resource officers in our high schools; and
- Require that they undertake enhanced training

The City of Gaithersburg supports both of these endeavors. We stand behind all efforts to enhance safety at our schools and provide support for students' mental health.

We stand up specifically for having the school resource officer program in our schools, not only for the purpose of school security and/or law enforcement, but also because of the opportunities for youth mentorship, and for positive interactions, trust, and bridge-building between police departments and young people in our community.

Our position is based, first and foremost, on our own experience with the SRO program at Gaithersburg High School, where it has had an overwhelmingly positive impact both on the school and the broader community. We are proud of it. Our police department is proud of it. The school community is grateful for it. And clearly, our experience isn't unique as the SRO program has the endorsement of every high school principal in the County.

We thoroughly reviewed the OLO's justification for eliminating the program, but find it insufficient. It's not to say that there isn't a disparity between the make-up of the population and the demographics of students who have been arrested. There's no dispute on that front. What the impact statement *doesn't do* is make the case that SROs are at the root of that disparity. In fact, it ignores relevant data that would contradict that conclusion; specifically, there were 269 student arrests during the last in-person school year. Of those, 260 were initiated, not by SROs, but by MCPS staff reports. That is to say, 97% of the arrests were *not* initiated by the SROs. Therefore, it makes no sense to conclude that the SRO program is at the root of this disparity.

Furthermore, if the County eliminates the SRO program, it makes no sense to expect a better result. MCPS staff will continue reporting students to law enforcement, when the circumstances warrant it. However, when a report is made, the police officer responding to the call likely won't have the

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specialized training or have established the trust of the school community or have any particular experience interacting with youth. How could this possibly be a better scenario for our schools or our students? It's clearly not.

The SRO program is a good one and it should be preserved; additional training requirements will make it better.

Thank you for your time and consideration – and for all you do for our County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jud Ashman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jud Ashman