

Bill 7-21 - School Resource Officer (SRO) Program

Testimony by Fred S. Evans

March 4, 2021

On May 7, 1997, the 23 high school principals of Montgomery County submitted a position paper, Safety and Security in Our High Schools, to Dr. Paul L. Vance, Superintendent of Schools, and his leadership staff. In that 10-page document the principals detailed their major concerns about school safety and security and offered suggestions for resolving the concerns.

Six months prior to that report, Gaithersburg High School initiated a pilot project of a school resource officer assigned to the school. This was a partnership between the City of Gaithersburg and Gaithersburg High School. The school resource officer began his work on January 1999 and that partnership continues to this day.

In December 2000, the school system decided to reject the concept of a school resource officer in each high school. This was despite a "minority position" signed by all 23 high school principals. Approximately three years later, County Executive Doug Duncan included funds in his budget for an officer in every high school and this program has continued since that time.

I maintain that the safety and security of our students, staff and community should be the primary focus of whether we maintain or cut this important program. Ask the former students, their parents, and staff members from Springbrook High School in 2009 about whether their resource officer was critical in discovering and stopping a plan to detonate bombs and harm specific staff members? The school resource officer was the primary reason that the life-threatening plan was discovered and averted.

I do not site this incident for dramatic effect because the school resource officer was at the school when the incident occurred. There are no guarantees, but I believe that resource officers in schools are critical in maintaining safe and positive school environments.

Let us not look back after serious incidents occur and wish that we would have made the tough decision to maintain this critical position. Implemented properly, it is a proactive program to support, and maintain, a secure learning environment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.