



Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850
Via: County.Council@MontgomeryCountyMD.gov

Cc: Montgomery County Public Schools Board of Education
Carver Educational Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive, Room 123
Rockville, MD 20850
Via: boe@mcpsmd.org

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO: Bill 7-21 - Police – School Resource Officer – Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools

Council President Hucker and Council members,

My name is Jaime Koppel. I am a resident of District 5 and a public school parent who, like each of you, wants the best for all of our students and staff. School climate and safety are my professional focus. I am the Co-Director of the Communities for Just Schools Fund. I strongly oppose Bill 7-21.

In brief, my professional experiences have uniformly reinforced the imperative that in order to ensure all schools welcome students and nurture their full potential we must move past the decades-long decline into schools serving as an extension of the carceral state.

More Training is Not the Answer

While I was Director of Education and Youth Justice at the Children's Defense Fund New York, I worked with parents to train School Safety Agents (police) on the lifelong consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline and alternatives to arrest and exclusion. Spoiler alert: that training did not change their practice and it certainly did not change harmful policies. While ineffective, it served as an easy to reference “remedy” for the New York Police Department - more training - for all instances in which students, families, or staff reported inappropriate actions by school safety agents.

Investments in Policing are Counter to Efforts to Create Holistically Safe, Supportive Schools

I served as a Senior Fellow in the U.S. Department of Justice where I worked on the Obama Administration's Supportive School Discipline Initiative. In that role I experienced first hand the dissonance of exponential investments - to the tune of more than \$1 billion - in SRO presence in schools around this nation (including right here in Montgomery County) while resources to support the unfulfilled promise of public education in this nation were and are not made available in equal measure. As Council Member Jawando indicated in his remarks during the introduction of this Bill,

there were many who were a part of the 21st Century Community Policing effort who were not in favor of school resource officer programs. We know even more today about the negative, disparate impact of school policing on Black and Brown youth and should not rely on outdated criminal justice reform recommendations as a rationale for our county's actions.

We Must Prioritize the Voices of Those Most Negatively Impacted By Our (In)actions

I currently work at the Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF) - an organization that resources grassroots organizers - students, parents/caregivers, and educators - in 31 states, Puerto Rico, and Ontario, Canada. These mostly Black- and Brown-led groups - our partners - have been advancing thoughtful, **urgent** demands for racial justice in education for many years. Many of them have been the architects and careful stewards of #PoliceFreeSchools victories we have seen in places like Oakland, Denver, Madison, and Toronto. I have heard officials in this County and elsewhere tout other #PoliceFreeSchools victories as something decided "overnight" rather than as policy wins for which organizers have thoughtfully built support like what you have heard via testimony and in meetings with Montgomery County students and allies.

The MC Defund/Invest Coalition - with leadership from Young People for Progress (YPP), MoCo Against Brutality, MoCo Students for Change, MoCo STEPS, and others - has continually shown us a better way forward. I associate myself with these incredible youth and adult allies.

I have a few questions:

Whose voices are you privileging in this bill and why?

When will the experiences, evidence and research that so many Black and Brown youth, parents, and advocates have shared be enough to counter the anecdotes of people who have nothing to fear from police?

How many more Black and Brown children must be arrested or harmed before you will take action to protect them and their peers?

Having engaged in efforts to advance education justice from so many different angles, I understand that changing the status quo is no easy thing. But fear and uncertainty are no justifications for inertia - for investing even one more dollar in a dangerous and flawed approach to "safety" that feeds this nation's legacy of racial illness at the expense of children's emotional, psychological, and physical safety.

This county needs you to be courageous and bill 7-21 is the opposite of that. During the introduction of this bill, Council Member Katz, you stated "Montgomery County should be the leader and the prototype" on this issue. Unfortunately, that ship has sailed. The game of hot potato that some members of the County Council and the Board of Education are playing with school safety

means that Montgomery County is behind.¹ And, our students - most especially Black and Brown students, LGBTQ+ students, and those with learning differences - are left to deal with the consequences of adults centering norms and values which enact emotional and psychological violence onto Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ youth in schools and communities.

Council Member Rice, while introducing this Bill you made a cautionary tale reference to “we only need to look to Rochester, NY to see what happens when those relationships (with police) are not there.” You were referencing the horrific treatment of a 9-year old child by Rochester police recently captured on video.² You missed the fact that right here in our own county a five-year old child was accosted and verbally abused by law enforcement when what he needed was safe passage back to school.³ We are no different, no better than Rochester. The burden of building positive relationships with police should not be placed on our children. That should not be their schoolwork or homework.⁴ SROs do not represent best practice. There is no evidence that they deter crime or ensure safety. And, scores of youth have come forward to share their stories of how they do not feel safe or supported with police in schools.⁵ Not to mention that as Council Member Riemer noted during the introduction of this Bill - people seem to forget that we have school security.

By even entertaining this bill, you are preventing forward action. MCPS will not grapple fully with the alternate realities they/we need to build⁶ while you spend time scotch taping the edges of what is clearly broken. Anything less than the dismantling of the SRO program will prevent MCPS from ensuring that school discipline approaches, social-emotional learning, curricula, and other school policies and practices are not used as a means of emotional, psychological, and intellectual policing and control.⁷ We will continue to espouse a commitment to being anti-racist while running in place and leaving our children behind.

Please do not perpetuate a belief gap grounded in the historic roots⁸ of systems that favor control and domination, that demonstrate daily that some children are more important than others. MCPS

¹ [“ACLU OVER 150 CIVIL RIGHTS ORGS URGE PRESIDENT BIDEN TO END FEDERAL FUNDING FOR POLICE IN SCHOOLS”](#), ACLU, February 25, 2021

² Shanahan, Ed. [“New Footage Emerges of Police Pepper-Spraying of Distraught 9-Year-Old.”](#) NYTimes.com, February 11, 2021

³ Holcome, Madeline and Moshtaghian, Artemis. [“Lawsuit alleges officers harassed and assaulted 5-year-old kindergartner.”](#) CNN.com, updated January 27, 2021.

⁴ [“Do the Harder Work: Create Cultures of Connectedness in Schools”](#), Communities for Just Schools Fund, December 2018 *“While emergency planning and infrastructure are important components of school design, calls to arm teachers, increase police presence in schools, and invest in further improving physical security infrastructure too often come at the expense of more holistic considerations of student well-being. Investments proven to criminalize children threaten to derail efforts towards the kinds of schools all young people need and deserve.”*

⁵ [“Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation”](#), February 2021 *“The Biden administration and Congress must end all federal funding for police and criminalizing infrastructure in schools, invest in education, and support a pipeline to college, including free access to colleges and universities, and eliminate barriers to higher education.”*

⁶ [“Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning: Centering Organizing Praxis for Holistically Safe Schools”](#), Communities for Just Schools Fund, October 2020

⁷ Kaler Jones, Cierra. [“When SEL is Used As Another Form of Policing.”](#) Medium.com/@JustSchools, May 7, 2020.

⁸ For more on the history of policing, visit Zinn Education Project’s [Teach the History of Policing](#) and Dream Defender’s [Sundday School](#).

students need you to stand with them so that we may get to the real work of “dismantling oppressive forces that stand in the way of justice.”⁹

⁹ [Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning: Centering Organizing Praxis for Holistically Safe Schools](#), p48, Communities for Just Schools Fund, October 2020