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Testimony in Support of Special Appropriations - December 1, 2020

1. \$406,000 for Youth Development - After School Youth Support & Engagement Hubs
2. \$750,000 for Restorative Justice Training for MCEA School Staff
3. \$312,455 for Children, Youth, and Family Services - Therapeutic Recreation Services for School-Age Youth

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers:

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann, I live in District 5, and I am writing this testimony in support of the three special appropriations to the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget: \$750,000 for restorative justice training for MCEA school staff; \$406,000 for after-school youth support and engagement hubs; and \$312,455 for therapeutic recreation services for school-age youth.

I have spent most of my career focused on youth justice policy, currently as the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN). During my years of work on youth justice policy, I have studied the significant role that school resource officers (SROs) and other school-based police officers play in driving youth into the juvenile justice system, a phenomenon that is now commonly known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” A growing body of research has **not** found evidence that schools with SROs are safer.¹ However, we do know that there are ways to measurably increase school safety that do not expand the school-to-prison pipeline — methods such as “restorative approaches, more mental health staff and counselors, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed care in our schools.”²

Funding these appropriations would provide a good first step. They will provide students with some of the supports they need to thrive, which may reduce emotional problems often leading to school disciplinary issues. These appropriations will also help schools develop expertise in restorative justice. Educators will then handle disciplinary issues in a way that is more beneficial to all students than the inequitable and failed approach of a law enforcement-based system. A recent study by the John Hopkins University Institute for Education (JHU) of the implementation of restorative practices in 14 Baltimore City schools, after the first full year of adopting the

¹S. 4360, Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act (116th Congress, 2019-2020), <https://bit.ly/2Ja7EZr>.

² ACLU Maryland, “The Future of Schooling: No Cops, More Counselors,” Sept. 29, 2020, <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/news/future-schooling-no-cops-more-counselors>.

practice, found that suspensions had decreased by 44% and school climate and relationships between teachers and students had improved.³

I anticipate future appropriations will also expand the number of school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists in Montgomery County Public Schools so that every school meets the professional standards recommended of at least 1 counselor and 1 social worker for every 250 students and at least 1 nurse and 1 psychologist for every 750 students and every 700 students, respectively.⁴ This will be particularly important after students return to school from the pandemic, due to the increased stress and trauma that all families have endured during this challenging time.

Children are regarded as the hope of the future, and among Jewish people this is further enhanced in that children are viewed as a divine trust. We urge you to approve these appropriations to help safeguard our children's future.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Coretz Goemann

³ OSI Baltimore, "Restorative Practices in Baltimore City Schools: Research Updates and Implementation Guide" (Sept. 2020): 6,

<https://www.osibaltimore.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RP-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf>.

⁴ S. 4360, Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act (116th Congress, 2019-2020), <https://bit.ly/2Ja7EZr>.