

The Silver Spring Justice Coalition enthusiastically supports the special appropriations to fund youth development, restorative justice training for MCPS staff, and therapeutic services. SSJC has advocated for licensed mental health professionals to replace police on mental health crisis calls. We see a disturbing parallel in the presence of school resource officers in roles that belong in the hands of educators, counselors, and licensed mental health professionals skilled in adolescent development.

The school resource officer program is a remnant of outdated and racist practices that feed the school to prison pipeline and have no place in Montgomery County schools.

We have a responsibility to create compassionate and respectful school communities where youth know they are safe and that the adults in charge will be well equipped to help them navigate bullying, conflict, or emotional and behavioral issues. Each one of the proposed initiatives demonstrates an understanding that our youth deserve the care of professional staff and that they need opportunities for social and emotional development.

When Black, Brown, and/or immigrant youth enter every Montgomery County school building, they should feel welcome and safe. We have learned from several anecdotal reports and data gathered by Young People for Progress and Council Members Jawando and Reimer that these young people have been profiled, targeted, and harassed. For Black, Brown, and/or immigrant youth, the presence of police does not signal “you are safe and welcome here”. Police officers do not represent a friendly welcoming adult, but rather the potential for harm.

It is well known from neuroscience research on trauma that when the autonomic nervous system is activated because it perceives danger, the part of the brain that we need to solve a math problem, think critically about history, or analyze a poem is not able to function as it would under conditions of safety and calm. No one wants Black, Brown, and/or immigrant youth to face this impediment to their education and well-being.

The special appropriations introduced by Council Members Jawando and Reimer are necessary to address the heightened need for mental health, and social, and educational support in this very challenging moment in our country. However, these funds are only a partial solution. Until police resource officers are removed from schools, the potential for immeasurable psychological harm to young people remains. We oppose the presence of police in our schools and urge the County Council to completely remove school resource officers from MCPS.

Naomi Nim, Ed.D., LPC, psychotherapist
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