

Quinn Spence
Kensington, MD

Testimony in Support of Bill 46-20 SRO Removal - February 4, 2021

My name is Quinn Spence, I'm a senior at Einstein High School, and I live in District 3. I'm testifying in support of Bill 46-20, calling for the removal of School Resource Officers (SROs) from Montgomery County schools.

When I first entered high school, I didn't see anything wrong with the fact that we had an armed police officer on campus during school hours. It was telling of my privilege that for the first couple of years I spent in school, I didn't think much of the police car parked in front of the school all day. I understood police officers to be a threat to people of color, people with disabilities and mental health issues, and an overall threat to the wellbeing of many of my peers. Recently, though, I came to learn about the reality of the SRO program.

Constitutionally, SROs have no legal duty to protect the students they serve, as confirmed by the trial of the police officer stationed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School -- whose school shooting catalyzed the State's Safe to Learn Act -- and was caught on camera fleeing campus during the Parkland shooting.

There is no national, state-wide, or local data confirming that officers keep us safe in schools. Montgomery County's own Office of Legislative Oversight states that studies 'have not found conclusive evidence that the presence of school based law enforcement has prevented school shootings or had a positive effect on students' perceptions of school safety.'

But data does confirm that students in schools with police officers are five times more likely to be arrested on campus than their counterparts in police-free schools. Student behavior, typical of many teens, such as drug use and truancy becomes criminalized when law enforcement officers are stationed at schools. In fact, research shows that Black students feel /ess safe with police presence in schools. The SRO at my high school was casually involved in classroom activities, and even played in the school band, with no regard for the distress of students of color who were forced to share a classroom environment with an armed officer, handcuffs at his waist, equipped with a bulletproof vest.

Montgomery County spends millions on the SRO program every year, yet we know alternative student support programs are more successful to actively intervene in and improve the lives of students. Data shows that the most successful responses are handled by a professional counselor, advisor, or social worker. Alternatives to policing, such as trauma-informed therapy and counseling, restorative justice programs, and community building and support programs improve the health and quality of students' lives, building trust and relationships rather than a sense of fear.

I am set to graduate from MCPS this June, and I want to be proud of the school that I leave behind. I want the future of my school to be one that prioritizes student safety and health, not the school-to-prison pipeline. I want students to be able to grow and learn from their mistakes, rather than being thrown in jail. I want our community to be safe, encourage growth, and prioritize student needs over the illusion of safety and reality of carceral trauma created and upheld by police in schools.

As such, I urge you to support the SRO Removal Bill.

Respectfully,

Quinn Spence