

Testimony

Bill 46-20 Elimination of School Resource Officers — **Strongly OPPOSE**

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In 2014, I shadowed an SRO, Officer Russell Larson for a half day. First we visited Seneca Valley HS, then visited a middle and elementary school in the same cluster. If any elected official had experienced what I did that day, they would know the great value of the SRO program in Montgomery County.

Incident #1: As I entered the high school and began to greet Officer Larson in the entryway, an adult stranger slipped through the front door with a backpack and began to walk quickly through the hallway. Officer Larson noticed him while talking to me (eyes in the back of his head I guess) and stopped him, asking politely where he was going. The man said he was in the school to “find the kids because they were missing.” (A recent news story had mentioned that two teens in the area were missing.) The officer asked the man to come with him into the Principal’s office. After the Principal and officer worked together to talk to this man and asked to see the contents of his backpack including his ID, the Principal was able to view the criminal record of the man on his computer. Evidence showed he was mentally disturbed. They sent him on his way with a warning not to return, and that the next time, they would have to take legal action. No arrest was made. No “heavy hand”, as was mentioned in bill 46-20. Just for the purposes of perspective, the man was black. There was no sign of discrimination. He was treated with dignity and respect. I thought the incident was handled with utmost professionalism.

Incident #2: The Principal at the middle school requested that Officer Larson talk to students involved in a fight as the result of a middle school student who sexted a picture that she sent to her boyfriend, which was shared on the internet with other students. Officer Larson met first with the teenage girl, to explain that sexting was against the law and they talked about the importance of self respect and how pictures stay forever on the internet. Then he met separately with the two boys who had previously fought. One was a cousin of the girl, angry that the other boy was looking at her picture on the internet. Officer Larson talked with the boys and calmed the situation. No arrests were made. No heavy hand. In my opinion, the students learned a lot that day about self respect, the law, and how to handle anger.

Visit #3: We then went to an elementary school where no incidents occurred. The children all smiled at Officer Larson as he high-fived the children in the hallway. Relationships were already built. They knew they had a friend in Officer Larson.

I also heard stories from Officer Larson and one of his fellow officers about some of the students they talk to who have a rough time at home. In addition the officer showed me how easy it would be to climb the “security wall” that MCPS built at one of the schools, demonstrating that the wall was a false sense of security.

It was an experience I would never forget. Officer Larson deeply cares for the students. He gave me a poster to remember my time with him and the students.

If you eliminate the SRO program, the opportunity cost will be priceless. You really can't put a price on the safety of students. Blaming the SRO program for the disparity of skin color in arrests and incidents is not evidence-based. Please look elsewhere to identify the reasons for the disparity.

