

Individual Testimony in Support of Bill 46-20

My name is Michelle Whittaker. I am a resident of District 4, and a parent of a MCPS student. I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony in support of Bill 46-20. Thank you to Councilmembers Jawando, Riemer, and Hucker for your support of police-free schools.

I am urging the County Council to prohibit school resources officers in our public schools. We have handed over our response to behavioral and discipline issues to a program that has proven itself time and time again to be ill-equipped to respond to student needs and unaccountable for their harm to our community.

My husband and I made a list to prepare for my daughter to enter public school - from shots to clothes to school supplies -- we wanted to make sure she had all the things she needed to succeed.. When I think about our preparations, police in schools is nowhere on the list.

Public safety should never be defined by force -- or the threat of force, yet that is the message we are sending our children. When we send a school resource officer to respond to a child struggling to focus in the classroom, we are not supporting that child. We are criminalizing hunger, mental health, or childhood itself.

The harm is real. A 5-year old berated and handcuffed. A 9 year old pepper sprayed and told they're "acting like a child." A high school student slammed to the ground so hard the cracking sound goes through your own body when you hear it. These are only the most recent stories from across the U.S and right here in Montgomery County. As you've heard in other testimony, the way school resource officers respond in schools is often excessive, disproportionate, and fails to create a safe environment for learning.

Hearing these stories, I see my young daughter and I am scared. Will a school resource officer see my brown-eyed, brown-skinned daughter as a child or a threat? Will they respond to her needs with support or restraints? Are we creating a pipeline to higher education or prison? When Black students are 10 times more likely to be arrested, I know the answers. The SRO program only continues to magnify the racial and economic disparities in our county and it is time to go.

We do not need more cops in school. We need counselors, social workers, food support, and other alternatives shown by recent, reliable studies to be more effective in supporting the educational, developmental, and behavioral needs of our students.

As a resident and a parent, I urge the County Council to vote in favor of Bill 46-20 and stop the continued placement of School Resource Officers in Montgomery County Public Schools.

Submitted respectfully,
Michelle C. Whittaker
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