

## **Testimony Bill 46-20**

Honorable Council President Hucker

Honorable Council

Greetings

My name is Robert Alex Stubblefield and I am an activist and organizer here in Montgomery County. While I am proud to be part of many of the progressive groups, I am testifying here as a black man born and raised here voicing my support of Bill 46-20, which calls for the removal of police in schools, commonly referred to as SRO's. and for more holistic measures to help us achieve racial equity in our schools and end the school to prison pipeline.

Why do I support this bill? The short answer is because police have no business being in schools. Now for the long answer, there have been studies showing how SRO's despite all the propaganda around them, show no evidence that they actually help the school stay secure. For instance, in Parkland, there was an SRO on duty at the time of the shooting and didn't stop the shooter. More importantly this county's own Office of Legislative Oversight as well as the MC Racial Equity Commission, have come out and said the SRO program is not contributing to student safety in any way. Given this evidence, why is it that there are some on this council despite all of this evidence as well as the summer of glorious uprisings, still push for them and expanding SRO's?. It is counterintuitive to lip service to saying Black Lives Matter and then turning around and being against a measure that would show that Black Lives Matter in our schools and then want to cite a Bethesda Beat article showing how 28% don't support taking cops out of schools, yet fail to realize that 72% of the county want cops out of schools. It is a shame that when teachers are underfunded, our schools are overcrowded, and given covid has revealed that we need internet/tech equity we don't have the money but when it comes to SRO's, we have all the money in the world. Removing SRO's would not only help save money to redirect in the things that truly matter but it will also help us move forward for racial equity.

Which brings me to my next point. Racial equity is the goal in all of this, while removing SRO's is not the end all be all towards that, it is a solid first step. According, not only does our own data compiled by the OLO show this, but the Brookings institute has stated that while black students make up roughly 20% of students, they account for roughly half of school-related arrests and suspensions and Latino/a students while making up 22% make up for the remaining

33% of arrests which brings the total percentage to over 80%! This is unacceptable and if this was a Republican county, this would be front page news, but since this is an alleged “Democratic” county, there is mumbling and grumbling. With these results, is it any wonder why not only Montgomery County, but the state of Maryland leads the nation in mass incarceration? When you put police, who have openly admitted that they are not trained to handle many situations combined with the racist history and targeting of the black body, this is the result that we should expect. In other words, schools go from being palaces of learning to training grounds for prisons. For me this is personal. While there are many stories that I can share, one story always stands out. When I was in high school my junior year, me and my best friend, who is Hispanic, while on a lunch break were stopped by an SRO because he said we looked like we were dealing drugs and tried to illegally search us. I explained my rights to him and told him unless he had a warrant or probable cause, you cannot search our persons. Instead of leaving, he then tried to have me arrested for failure to identify and resisting the command of an officer. I then told him in front of my principal that one, failure to identify only works if I have committed or was in the process of committing a crime. Me and my friend were then let go, and school, instead of being a palace of learning felt like a prison after that. In addition, I noticed how these SRO’s often times let white students slide but threw the gauntlet and showed no mercy to their black and brown counterparts even if it was for the same thing. When you have these encounters, especially those from whose students have testified that they don’t feel safe, the answer is obvious, end this program and end the school to prison pipeline and create a school to college-career-community readiness pipeline, a school to empowerment pipeline, a school to prosperity pipeline.

So what is to be done? After the SRO’s are removed, we must begin the process of bringing restorative justice to schools. This starts with hiring culturally competent social workers and teachers, because teachers as they are now are also contributors to school to prison pipeline more likely to throw the hammer to a black student and a slap on the wrist for white students. Culturally competent social workers and teachers will actually help build bridges to the students they’re supposed to be helping. In addition, bring in meditation rooms, yoga, tai chi, and qigong practices because these practices not only help a student re-center themselves but it helps better their focus. In fact in Baltimore, some schools have been doing this for some years and have had critical success. We here in Montgomery County, with the resources we have at our disposal should be the model around the country, the fact that we are not is disgraceful. Furthermore, this should all follow an African concept called Ubuntu. It means “I am because we are, we are because I am” It is basically a community concept that reaffirms the positive traits of our students and not holding the negative over their heads for the rest of their time in school. For that is also part of the problem. We cannot expect people to progress if folks in authority want to throw back all the bad things they have done and then wonder why they can’t move forward.

In closing, this body has an opportunity to right a course. Throughout this summer, this council has been out marching, and posting on social media that Black Lives Matter. With all due respect, posting and saying Black Lives Matter is easy. Voting for policy that shows that Black Lives Matter in a county with a long and ugly history of racism is harder. Now is not the time to try to pass the buck to the School Board. Since the council is funding it and votes, this council has the authority to remove the SRO's and actually walk the talk of racial equity in this county and make the progressive myth of Moco a reality.