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Testimony in Opposition to Bill 7-21
Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools
March 4, 2021

My name is Nicole Kaplan. I live in District 4, and I am the parent of an MCPS student. I am testifying in opposition to Bill 7-21, which has positioned itself as an alternative to Councilmembers Jawando and Riemer's Bill 46-20 that would remove School Resource Officers from Montgomery County schools. This bill falls way short of addressing the needs that so many members of our community, most importantly students, have voiced.

As a longtime resident of Montgomery County, I've been volunteering and educating myself through Jews United For Justice and have come away with an overwhelming response to the research and student accounts that police in schools are causing more harm than good. I cannot remain silent when there are children feeling unsafe in their own schools. SROs can and should be replaced with counselors, nurses, and security guards whose training is focused in their various areas of expertise. No longer should police officers be referring students to court or otherwise interfering in typical discipline and adolescent issues. It's inappropriate and disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx students and students with disabilities. Schools are a place for students to learn -- but maybe more importantly, to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes. Positioning police officers in schools to criminalize the mistakes all students make ruins lives.

The bill proposed by Council Members Katz and Rice widely fails to address the issue of police inequity and disproportionate criminalization of students of color. The OLO report, the Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce, the Policing Advisory Commission, and the overwhelming majority of testimony at the hearing for Bill 46-20 all agree -- the full removal of the SRO program will address these issues.

Offering more training and support to police officers is not the answer. At the end of the day, they are still not educators by trade. They are armed law enforcement officers. Schools need to be staffed with those trained in child and adolescent development,

subjects about which educators such as myself have spent a lifetime learning. A few workshops are not going to bring a police officer to the level that we should demand of all our school staff members.

Montgomery County Public Schools is one of the top school systems in the country; a system I proudly enrolled my daughter in this year as a kindergartner. My hope is that she grows up in a community where all kids feel safe, not just those that are white like her. I urge you to oppose Bill 7-21 and instead support the full removal of the SROs and replacement of police with trained, culturally competent mental health professionals.

Thank you,

Nicole Kaplan