

Anita Lampel
Bethesda, MD

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

My name is Anita Lampel. I live in Bethesda, in District 1. **This testimony is in opposition to Bill 7-21.**

I am a psychologist with a Ph.D. from Stanford University. In California, I served on state and county commissions often dealing with youth in the juvenile justice system, on advisory panels to my school board, and I was a court expert witness.

When I moved to Montgomery County, home to one of the finest school systems in the country, a progressive bastion, I was happy. Until I learned that Maryland has the highest percent of young Black men, ages 18 to 25, in prison of any other state. Until I learned that Maryland has one of the worst records for juvenile justice in the country. School Resource Officers (SROs) contribute to these gross inequities.

Maryland State Legislature's Blue-Ribbon Panel on The School to Prison Pipeline noted, in its December 2018 report, that: "School Resource Officers told us that they viewed increased arrests in schools as a positive result of their work."

Montgomery County's Office of Legislative Oversight Racial Equity and Social Justice provided two reports on SROs that stated unequivocally: "A review of the research suggests that school-police partnerships, even those aligned with best practices, lead to higher arrest rates and may not offer the best investment for improving students' learning environments."

In Maryland, SROs send students who are disproportionately Black or who are getting special education services to juvenile court for minor offenses that might otherwise have been considered within the scope of normal student discipline, handled by the principal and staff. Montgomery County SROs are just like those in the studies and the impact is just as inequitable.

Alternative approaches like counseling, trauma informed interventions, crisis teams, restorative justice, have a long lasting positive impact on all students, on the entire school community, not just those in trouble. Toronto, Canada has rid itself of SROs to enhance equity, added support services, and students are thriving.

Student activists are among the many groups stating they do not want police in schools. You are responsible for the long-term best interests of these students. They are the residents of our County, and your constituents. Bill 7-21 fails to address the demands of students, parents, educators, and administrators looking to replace armed law enforcement in school with well-funded, substantial alternatives to support the needs of our students.

I respectfully urge a vote against Bill 7-21.