

Sara Migler
Washington, DC

Testimony in Opposition to Bill 7-21
March 4, 2021

My name is Sara Migler and I am writing to testify in opposition to Bill 7-21, which would keep School Resource Officers (SROs) in Montgomery County Public Schools. I am testifying as the coordinator of Bonimot Tzedek, a social justice leadership and activism program for Jewish teens in Montgomery County.

I went to high school at Richard Montgomery, where I never thought much of the police officers who spent time in the building. But I was in high school when Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, and Eric Garner were murdered at the hands of police, and this threw into question my beliefs about the role of police in our society.

In 2014, I went to a Black Lives Matter protest downtown, and heard story after story of Black and brown youth being threatened, intimidated, and physically harmed by police. It became clear to me that as a Jew, I have a responsibility to work to dismantle *all* systems of oppression. Anyone who represents racial violence does not keep me or my community safe.

We must seek alternatives to police officers in community spaces like schools. In high school, I had a Black classmate who sat behind me in many different classes, who I also knew sold weed. One day he asked me what my plans were after high school and I told him I was planning to go to college. I asked what his plans were, and he told me “I want to go to Montgomery College, but I probably will go to jail.”

The presence of police officers in our schools does not strengthen our communities or protect any of us when it means that Black and brown students are disproportionately arrested, intimidated, and followed.

What if instead of arresting Black students who carried or sold drugs in school, those students were connected to skilled mental health professionals who could make sure that they were safe? What if instead of police intervening when students in schools are fighting, the students were connected to restorative justice processes that helped them resolve the conflict, not just in the moment, but for the long haul?

As a student in MCPS, I saw so many peers struggling with mental health, family troubles, and poverty, and not being able to access the resources they needed in school. I am moved when I think about how transformative it would be if the money that is allocated toward police in schools were re-allocated toward counselors and mental health professionals.

As a Jewish educator, I want the youth that I work with to see the value of community care over punishment reflected in their schools. Bill 7-21 does the exact opposite, and would perpetuate our county's school to prison pipeline. I urge you to vote in opposition to Bill 7-21 and instead replace each SRO with a mental health professional and restorative justice practices.

Respectfully,

Sara Migler