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**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO BILL 7-21**  
**Building Positive Relationships with Law Enforcement in Schools**  
**March 4, 2021**

My name is Kate Sugarman, MD, and I live in District I. I am testifying in opposition to Bill 7-21, which would continue the county's School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

I have been working as a public health physician for many decades, for my entire professional career. All of the patients I see are low income, and almost all are families of color, either Black or Latinx. Many of these families are immigrants.

Unfortunately, I see firsthand what happens when youth are apprehended by police rather than given the social services and mental health care that they desperately need.

Our nations' schools have become one of the key feeders of a disproportionate number of youth of color into the juvenile justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline is exacerbated by the growing number of police officers stationed in schools, in programs such as Montgomery County's School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

Bill 7-21 quotes Obama-era data about the hypothetical protections SROs could provide students. But as the Montgomery County's Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) stated in their Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement on Bill 7-21, "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."

Not only did the OLO find that schools with SROs have higher arrest rates than schools without SROs, but their research about the demographics of MCPS arrests found that Black students are over-represented in school-based arrests in the County, accounting for 47% of all arrests in MCPS schools even though they only account for 22% of MCPS enrollment.

We can and must do better for our children. Having police officers stationed in schools is a relatively recent phenomenon, not a practice written in stone. I grew up without a police presence in my entire education in Baltimore City public schools, as I'm sure many of you did as well. My principal, school counselors, and teachers served as

educators in all senses of the word - meaning teaching students how to learn in a way that included how to behave appropriately. We can successfully return to that model, which resulted in far less criminalization of childhood conduct, if we look for a more holistic way to support our students.

The OLO found that Bill 7-21 is **not** likely to enhance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. I hope that the Council will take the findings of the OLO's RESJ Impact Statement seriously and will act to actually reduce racial and ethnic arrest disparities in MCPS schools by eliminating the SRO program and working to promote several best practices to advance RESJ within public schools that OLO recommended. These include more funding for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers; expanding positive behavioral interventions and supports; and expanding restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and empathetic discipline programs.

There is a Jewish teaching that whoever saves a life, saves the world. I urge you to act to protect many children's futures by opposing Bill 7-21 and instead calling for the full removal of police from schools.

Thank you,

Kate Sugarman  
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