

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARC ELRICH ON BILL 7-21, POLICE – SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS – BUILDING POSITIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN SCHOOLS

Greetings Council President and Councilmembers, my name is Caroline Sturgis, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer. I appear before you today on behalf of County Executive Elrich regarding Bill 7-21, Police – School Resource Officers Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools. The County Executive is not in support of this bill which will allow the SRO program to continue. The Executive supports removing fulltime SROs from the schools, enhancing school personnel trained in behavioral health interventions and restorative justice practices, and re-designating SROs as community resource officers.

The community resource officers (CROs) will work in partnership with the district Community Service Officer and provide coverage to a group of schools that can be responded to in a timely manner. Under this restructured school cluster model, officers would check-in at their assigned schools at least once during the workday, patrol the areas around their assigned schools, and respond to calls for service at their schools. Officers would not be available all day on school campuses. We believe daily check-ins, having officers in the proximity, and being able to respond more quickly meets the adequate coverage as required under State Safe to Learn Act.

The CROs will be available to respond to school incidents that escalate toward violence and cannot be resolved appropriately by restorative justice practitioners and school personnel. These CROs will have specialized training in de-escalation practices and crisis intervention without the use of lethal weapons. CROs will still be required to complete customized trainings developed by the state, Maryland Center for School Safety, and MCPD to guide officers on how to work well with adolescents in a school environment. They will also become familiar with restorative justice practices and will develop formal relationships with restorative justice practitioners in each school for the most appropriate and coordinated response when CROs involvement is required. They will also partner with existing youth community interventions

such as positive youth development (PYD) to promote the wellbeing of students, especially as the students interact with their families and their neighbors when schools are not in session.

Officers will continue to be encouraged to cultivate positive relationships with the students without them being in schools to police the students. Administrators and school security officers should deal with student misconduct through restorative justice and equitable disciplining instead of seeking police intervention. We should also augment schools with counselors and mental health professionals as an alternative to keeping schools safe while supporting the needs of students through social workers. And when the services of police are needed, the schools may call in police as a last resort – not the first option.

In summary, the County Executive supports reimagining public safety in our community and schools. His vision includes reforming the School Resources Officers program that shifts the officers away from a permanent assignment in schools to a school cluster Community Resource Officers model as previously described. This along with everything previously mentioned supports safety, equity, and the wellbeing of our students, faculty, and communities.