



*Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live. [www.acy.org](http://www.acy.org)*

**House Ways and Means Committee  
Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 28  
Primary and Secondary Education - Security - School Resource Officers**

January 28, 2015

Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) was founded in 1987 by a group of prominent child advocates in Maryland who saw the need for an independent organization to advocate for the needs of the state's children and families in the community, the media, and the public policy arena. ACY's mission is to identify problems, promote policies and programs that improve results for Maryland's children in measurable and meaningful ways, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and policies for the state's children and youth.

ACY is dedicated to ensuring that Maryland's students can succeed in safe and supportive school environments; and we support reasonable efforts to keep our students and staff safe. Many schools and districts have, and continue to review & revise, safety plans that are instrumental in keeping their schools safe. Additionally, because schools can already use their state funding to fund school resource officers (SROs) and school security efforts, many have also already committed resources to these safety measures. *Additionally, spending state dollars on more SROs is not proven to produce an overall positive effect for schools. In fact, SROs can do students and schools more harm than good.*

**SROs Negatively Impact School Climate**

A positive school climate where students feel safe and supported is essential for maintaining the safety of a school. While some SROs are an integral part of the school community and can connect with students, research shows that the presence of SROs contributes to a policing environment in schools that leads to increased suspensions and school-based arrests, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities. These students that are suspended or arrested in school are then more likely to both drop out and become involved in the criminal justice system as adults. Additionally, SROs are not critical at the elementary level. Not only is a law enforcement response inappropriate for typical childhood misbehavior, but elementary aged students do not possess the requisite knowledge of the nature and seriousness of the juvenile justice system to benefit from coming into contact with it.



### **Keeping Maryland's Students & Schools Safe**

The ability for schools to build positive climates, and to provide resources for teachers and staff regarding de-escalation techniques, would do far more than SROs to prevent negative encounters and challenging behaviors.

Many of the schools and districts around the state with the lowest levels of suspensions and expulsions have strong school climates characterized by high behavioral and academic expectations for both students and staff. These schools set the expectations for the school community clearly and early on; have programs and processes in place to appropriately respond to students' behavioral issues; and train staff on techniques to use with students who are misbehaving that stop problem behaviors as they arise.

An additional, proven method for establishing positive school climates and safe schools is ensuring that students receive the appropriate academic, social, and emotional supports they need to succeed, particularly regarding mental health. A strong school-based mental health model can effectively respond to students' stressors that lead to academic disengagement and/or acting out.

Advocates for Children and Youth will continue to work with local jurisdictions and the Maryland State Department of Education to ensure that students, staff, and communities can create the positive school climates and safe environments that will help all of Maryland's students succeed.

HB 28 does not advance the goal of ensuring that all students can benefit from positive school climates and safe schools. **ACY urges an unfavorable report House Bill 28.**