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Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee

In SUPPORT of

House Bill 439- Public Schools- School Resource Officers- Prohibited Conduct

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 439- Public Schools- School Resource Officers- Prohibited Conduct. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

One of ACY's major education-related legislative priorities includes reducing the presence of police officers and their powers in schools. While we recognize that some individual school-based personnel have the ability to form strong, positive relationships with students in the schools they serve, we know that anecdotes are not strong sources of applicable data.

Empirical evidence shows us that for youth, even one instance of police contact increases the likelihood that they will fall behind in school, become further involved in the juvenile justice system, and/or even drop out of school altogether.¹

Nationally, contact with a School Resource Officer (SRO) or school police officer has been shown to yield immediate negative consequences in the form of physical brutality and/or psychological trauma. The presence of SROs, school police, and other forms of in-building security is a relatively recent phenomenon in public education, beginning in Flint, Michigan in the 1950s. Since then, SROs and similar school-based personnel have proliferated nationally, becoming nearly ubiquitous with urban school districts serving large populations of students of color.²

That proliferation has resulted in a slippery slope of blurred lines and lanes of authority for SROs which today manifests in an augmented role for SROs and their peers that looks very different from the community policing model we began with. Here **in Maryland, students are routinely arrested in school** and introduced to the justice system **for behavior infractions that are expected in adolescent neurological development.**³ More concerning is the fact that most of the categories for which students are arrested are based in subjective observations, like

¹ Wiley, Stephanie Ann. "The Amplification of Deviance Following Police Contact: An Examination of Individual and Neighborhood Factors among a Sample of Youth" July 2, 2014.

² Stinson Sr and Watkins. "The Nature of Crime by School Resource Officers: Implications for SRO Programs" SAGE Open. January-March 2014.

³ Sunderman and Janulis. "When Law Enforcement Meets School Discipline: School-related Arrests in Maryland 2015-16" University of Maryland School of Education Data Brief. June 2018.



disorderly conduct. Most concerning of all, however, is the disparity in arrests for Black students (66% of arrests while 34% of total population) and students with disabilities (22% of arrests and 11% of total enrollment).⁴ These inequities cannot be allowed to continue.

Today's students undoubtedly face security threats and dangers in school that are different from what past generations have seen. They must be addressed, and thoroughly so. In instances where external security threats to students and school staff are presented, the expertise and leadership of an SRO is invaluable. However, SROs should never play a role in matters of routine school discipline if no imminent threat to the safety and/or lives of students and staff is present. When subjective code of conduct violations like rude behavior, poor language, and even schoolyard fights occur, those instances should remain the responsibility of educators and school administration to solve.

The statewide commission of the school-to-prison pipeline and restorative practices has made its recommendations, which include the increased adoption and utilization of restorative approaches to school discipline and the training of teachers and other school staff in the areas of implicit bias, culturally relevant pedagogy, and general cultural competency.⁵ **We must seize these recommendations instead of falling into the zero-tolerance, hyper-securitized, ineffective practices we've seen fail in the past.**

HB 439 prevents SROs and other school security personnel from being involved in routine disciplinary matters and instead offers Maryland schools, teachers, and students the opportunity to explore restorative approaches to school discipline. For all the reasons above, **ACY strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**

⁴ ibid

⁵ Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices. "Report to the Maryland Governor and General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 1287 (2017)" December 20, 2018.



