

Amendment 1 (Sabadosa) to H. 4860: Ensuring Public Accountability for School Policing

Current law requires police to assign a school resource officer (SRO) to each district (G.L. c. 71 § 37P). **Amendment 1 (Sabadosa) would place the decision to assign SROs in the hands of school committees, where it belongs, by annual public vote.** If a superintendent wants school resource officers (SROs), each year, they have to inform the school committee and state:

- How much it will cost,
- How much funding supports mental and emotional health support personnel, and
- How many school-based arrests and referrals there were in the previous year.

If a superintendent fails to do so, their request for SROs shall be deemed invalid. The Amendment also clarifies that state laws on SROs apply to the school district employees deputized by police to serve in schools.

How does Amendment 1 change H. 4860? Section 66 of H. 4860 strikes language in S. 2820 that would place the decision to assign SROs with superintendents and school committees. Amendment 1 restores and strengthens that language. Section 66 also calls for the establishment of a model memorandum of understanding (MOU) review commission to set the floor for what all school/police MOUs must include. Amendment 1 would remove this requirement as state agencies recently issued such a model MOU in 2018.¹

Amendment 1 give parents, students, educators, and communities a necessary voice in deciding whether to place police in schools. Here's why it's needed:

School-based police mean school-based arrests, too often for a school discipline violation.² A first arrest doubles the odds a student drops out.³ Massachusetts' Black and Latino students are far more likely than their white peers to be arrested at school, especially for school discipline matters.⁴ There is significant misunderstanding between Massachusetts' police officers and school administrators on the role of police in schools.⁵

Placing police in schools is expensive, especially during budget shortfalls when students may not even be in school buildings. Meanwhile, our state's ratio of students to counselors, 304:1, fails to meet the nationally recommended ratio (250:1).⁶

Schools and police are not complying with the reforms of 2018. The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board reports that many cities did not adopt the policing agreements required by the *Criminal Justice Reform Act* (CJRA).⁷ Fewer still report the data that the law requires. Only 31 of 289 school districts reported any arrests. Springfield, Worcester, and Lowell reported **zero**, along with 48 other large districts.

Please contact Representative Sabadosa to co-sponsor: lindsay.sabadosa@mahouse.gov

¹ Office of the Atty. Gen., Exec. Office of Pub. Safety & Security, Dep't. of Elem. & Secondary Education, *State Agencies Release Model Memorandum of Understanding for School Resource Officers* (Sept. 5, 2018).

² Hon. Jay Blitzman, *Police Aren't Needed in Schools*, Commonwealth Magazine (Jun. 10, 2020).

³ Gary Sweeten, *Who Will Graduate?*, 23 Justice Quarterly 462, 473-477 (2006).

⁴ Robin Dahlberg, *Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts's Three Largest School Districts* (2012).

⁵ Johanna Wald and Lisa Thurau, *First, Do No Harm* (2010).

⁶ American Civil Liberties Union, *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students* (2019).

⁷ Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board, *Early Impacts of an Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform* 65 (2019).