

Coalition for Smart Responses to Student Behavior

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Robert DeLeo, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Claire Cronin, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Carlos González, Chair of the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus

RE: Testimony on School Policing and S. 2800

Dear Speaker DeLeo, Chair Cronin, Chair Michlewitz, Chair González, and Members of the House's Judiciary Committee, Ways and Means Committee, and Black and Latino Legislative Caucus:

We urge the House to address school policing in its police accountability bill. Specifically, we seek your leadership in securing:

1. **An end to police placement in schools, and**
2. **Public accountability for what police do in schools.**

Our first priority is removing police from schools. A simple change can do so and keep schools safe. The definition of a "school resource officer" (SRO) in G.L. c. 71 § 37P(a) can be amended to include: *A school resource officer shall not be located on school grounds but at the local police station and shall be charged with serving as the primary responder to calls from public schools.*

In light of your upcoming hearing on the Senate's Reform, Shift + Build Act (S. 2800), we also write to identify the aspects of the Senate bill we most strongly support. They are:

- **Amendment 80** (Jehlen): Lets school committees decide, by annual public vote, whether to assign police to schools. Requires superintendents to annually share data on the costs of school policing, the budget for mental and emotional health support, and school-based arrests and referrals with the public, school committee, and the department of education.
- **Amendment 108** (Jehlen): Prohibits information-sharing from school staff and school police to the Boston Regional Intelligence Center and other gang databases.

We also wish to note our support for two amendments that increase training for police in engaging youth and students, but we must be clear that any training must not come out of school budgets and **training alone is deeply insufficient:**

- **Amendment 25** (Boncore): Requires specific training for SROs to be developed in consultation with experts, and to be required before an officer can be assigned as an SRO.
- **Amendment 41** (Friedman): Requires police training on developmentally appropriate de-escalation and disengagement tactics and alternatives to the use of force for minor children.

Here's why:

School-based police mean school-based arrests, too often for a school discipline violation.¹

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

¹ Hon. Jay Blitzman, *Police Aren't Needed in Schools*, Commonwealth Magazine (Jun. 10, 2020).

² Gary Sweeten, *Who Will Graduate?*, 23 Justice Quarterly 462, 473-477 (2006).

³ Robin Dahlberg, *Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts's Three Largest School Districts* (2012).

⁴ Johanna Wald and Lisa Thureau, *First, Do No Harm* (2010).

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).⁵

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).⁶ 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.

Parents, students, educators, and communities need a say in deciding what police do in schools. We ask for your leadership in securing that say. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Smart Responses to Student Behavior

Together with the following organizations and individuals:

ACLU of Massachusetts
ADL New England
Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)
Center for Public Representation
Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Citizens for Public Schools
Committee for Public Counsel Services
CORI & Reentry Project of Greater Boston Legal Services
Disability Law Center
Framingham Families for Racial Equity in Education
Freitas & Freitas
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
Massachusetts Attorneys for Special Education Rights (MASER)
Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids at Health Law Advocates
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)
Power of Self-Education (POSE) Inc.
Strategies for Youth
Youth on Board

Honorable Jay D. Blitzman (Ret.)
Daniel J. Losen, Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA's Civil Rights Project (Mass. resident, organization listed for affiliation purposes only)
Denise Wolk, Education Consultant

(Contacts next page)

⁵ American Civil Liberties Union, *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students* (2019).

⁶ Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board, *Early Impacts of an Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform* 65 (2019).

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