

July 17, 2020

Honorable Chairman Aaron Michlewitz
Chair Claire Cronin
Vice Chair Denise Garlick,
Vice Chair Michael Day
House Ways & Means Committee
The Massachusetts House of Representatives
The Statehouse
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support for Youth Protections Built into SB2820

Dear Representative:

As you consider the house version of Senate Bill 2820, we urge you to fully support and keep in place the language that protects youth.

I write on behalf of Strategies for Youth (SFY), a national nonprofit policy and training organization dedicated to improving police/youth interactions and reducing racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. It is our experience that the lack of oversight and accountability of law enforcement in MA need to be strengthened. We write today to **express our support of SB2820 bill.**

In particular we urge you to support these specific provisions affecting youth:

- **Expand the Use of Force Protections for Youth in Rep. Miranda's bill (HD.5128)**

As written, SB2820 does not provide any language that would require law enforcement to distinguish between use of force on children and youth from that used on adults. We urge the House to go beyond the Senate's bill, which provides only minimal language requiring non mandatory training, but no language that requires law enforcement to use developmentally appropriate de-escalation techniques, and use of force that is proportionate to a minor child's age, physical and mental capacity.

The results of the investigation of the Springfield Police Department conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice on July 9th, as well as the recent case involving the beating of a 12-year old in Holyoke, illustrate the need for stronger protections for youth.

- **Data transparency in the juvenile justice system (Rep. Tyler's bill, H.2141);**

- **Expanding expungement eligibility for youth** to rectify the well documented over-criminalization of Black and Latinx youth (**Rep. Decker's bill, H.1386** and as passed by the Senate);

- **End monitoring and electronic surveillance of students in schools** through local, state and federal shared law enforcement databases (as passed in Section 49 of S.2820);

- **Require school committee approval by public vote for decisions regarding deployment of SROs to schools**, and require that law enforcement officers be stationed in a police station and on-call for schools, rather than being stationed on school property (as passed in Section 50 of S.2800)

We also support two amendments that increase training for police in engaging youth and students:

- **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.

The cost of training law enforcement officers should be borne by the MPTC. The MPTC must be authorized to sanction officers who do not attend training, as 62% of Massachusetts officers did not do, per the Office of the State Auditor's report in 2018.

We urge you to go further: **training is necessary but not sufficient and rendered less meaningful when it is not accompanied by policies and laws that support it.**

We are grateful for your consideration of our recommendations. And we thank you for promoting this array of legal and institutional reforms to improve accountability, professionalism and justice in Massachusetts.

Very truly yours,



Lisa H. Thureau,
Executive Director