

Coalition for Smart Responses to Student Behavior

July 17, 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. 2820

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. 2820), we also write to identify the aspects of the Senate bill we most strongly support. They are:

- **Section 50 (with correction below):** 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. We recommend an additional correction: the words "subject to annual approval by public vote of the relevant school committee" were stricken inadvertently and should be re-inserted after the words "agricultural school" in line 1122 so that it properly mirrors the same in lines 1124-5.
- **Section 49:** 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 sections in S.2820 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:**

- **Section 5 of S.2820:** 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.
- **Sections 4 (l. 215-217) & 73:** 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

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).

matters.³ There is significant misunderstanding between Massachusetts' police officers and school administrators on the role of police in schools.⁴

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.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Smart Responses to Student Behavior

Together with the following organizations and individuals:

ACLU of Massachusetts

Action for Boston Community Development

ADL New England

Bethel Institute for Social Justice/Generation Excel

Black Lives Matter- Worcester

Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)

Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Center for Public Representation

Center for Teen Empowerment

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute, Harvard Law School

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts

Citizens for Juvenile Justice

Citizens for Public Schools

City Mission Society

The City School

Coalition for Effective Public Safety

Committee for Public Counsel Services

CORI & Reentry Project of Greater Boston Legal Services

Criminal Justice Policy Coalition

Disability Law Center

Dorchester Youth Collaborative

Ending Mass Incarceration Together

Fair Sentencing of Youth

Framingham Families for Racial Equity in Education

Freitas & Freitas

Friends of Children

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders

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).

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).

The Home for Little Wanderers
High Risk Youth Network
I Have a Future/Youth Jobs Coalition
InnerCity Weightlifting
Jobs Not Jails
Justice Resource Institute
Juvenile Rights Advocacy Program, Boston College Law School
Louis D. Brown Peace Institute
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
Massachusetts Attorneys for Special Education Rights (MASER)
Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
Mass Mentoring Partnership
Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids at Health Law Advocates
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
MissionSAFE
More Than Words
Mothers for Justice & Equality
My Life My Choice
Nat'l Alliance on Mental Illness – MA
North American Family Institute
Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)
Power of Self-Education (POSE) Inc.
Prisoners' Legal Services
Project RIGHT
RFK Children's Action Corp
Roxbury Youthworks
Sociedad Latina
Spectrum Health Services
Strategies for Youth
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network
Violence in Boston
Vital Village Network
Worcester Interfaith
Young Sisters/Young Brother United
Youth Build Boston
Youth on Board
YW Boston

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