



Maryland Education Coalition

The Maryland Education Coalition is dedicated to raising the academic achievement of students in Maryland public schools by promoting adequate funding and systemic accountability for improving results.

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Testimony Before the Ways and Means Committee In Opposition to

House Bill 20 – Security – School Resource Officers

January 29, 2014

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) fights for adequate, equitable funding and systemic accountability because every child deserves a quality education and because achievement gaps must be closed.

We also support increased funding to improve the public school buildings where our children learn, concentrating on areas of greatest need. Every child and school employee deserves a school building that promotes and protects academic achievement and occupant health in a safe and orderly environment, but unacceptable disparities persist.

MEC supports the allocation of funds for school security improvements, but we believe this should be determined at the local school system level, school by school. The School Safety Center, initiated through legislation in 2013, is tasked in studying school security alternatives and providing technical assistance to local school systems.

MEC supports the following:

- Safety education via public school curricula and community programs;
- Support and promotion of programs to educate parents, children, youth, and communities about the importance of firearm safety;
- Promotion of public education campaigns to alert parents and community to the devastating effects of firearm-related violence; and
- Adoption of school-level and school district-level safety policies and guidelines, including the preparation of educators and pupil support personnel in crisis response.

House Bill 20 imposes a state-level mandate on every school in Maryland. We do not believe there is sufficient evidence that universal deployment of School Resource Officers (SROs) is the right solution for all the various communities and regions of the State. The children in our schools are at risk of a diverse range of threats to their physical and psychological security, and these require a range of responses from law enforcement, social work, pupil personnel, mental health, and many other disciplines. The district and school-based decision-makers are in the position to tailor the response to their school population.

We ask the General Assembly to provide adequate, equitable funding to support all of the educational, social and emotional needs of all of our public schools so that they can ensure they have specially trained staff to promote safe and orderly environments. In doing so, you maintain the flexible approach that was a cornerstone of the Bridge to Excellence Act. We also urge you to enlist our various other state and local government agencies and the new School Safety Center to partner with our public school systems to provide the additional supports, resources and specialized skills that are not generally a part of any local school system.

We do not see House Bill 20 moving that recommended approach forward and we urge an unfavorable report.