



TESTIMONY OF CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY
IN SUPPORT OF ELIMINATING POLICE PRESENCE IN SCHOOLS
& ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR POLICE IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

September 24, 2020

Police Transparency & Accountability Task Force

Good morning Members of the Connecticut Police Transparency & Accountability Task Force. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), a non-profit organization affiliated with University of Connecticut School of Law that provides holistic legal services to Connecticut's poorest and most vulnerable youth, through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

CCA chairs several Racial and Ethnic Disparity Committees in Connecticut's major cities including Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury, the purpose of which are to reduce the infiltration of youth of color into the juvenile justice system. By convening key stakeholders, these Committees review the different entry points into the juvenile justice system, including arrests at schools and in the communities, to shine the light on problematic practices and problem solve ways to identify alternatives. CCA also provides direct individual representation to countless youth who are involved in the juvenile justice or adult criminal systems. By virtue of this fact, the lives of this group of clients we represent are greatly impacted by the police they come in contact with. While we represent some youth in juvenile court, we represent countless youth concerning their education. Most of these youth are youth with disabilities. Moreover, the vast majority of these youth, are youth of color. The collective experiences of our clients, particularly as it relates to the presence of police in schools for youth of color, is the perspective that we would like to share with the Task Force. Based on this experience, we would request that Task Force expand its recommendations to include removing all police, including the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) from Connecticut's schools and also ensure that memoranda of agreement be expanded and continue to govern the conduct of police in our schools.

Police presence in schools is traumatizing for Connecticut's students of color. It is well established, both in Connecticut and nationally, that youth of color experience trauma when coming into contact with the police.¹ Research supports that youth of color experience more

¹ Stokes-Hudson, Camara, Ruth, Lauren, Waithe Simmons, Wendy, "Policing Connecticut's Hallways: The Prevalence and Impact of School Resource Officers in Connecticut," CT Voices for Children Policy Report (April

anxiety and actually feel less safe when confronted with law enforcement in their school environment.² This fact cannot be ignored when we think about continuing to place police in our schools. Research suggests that the placement of SROs in Connecticut's schools actually does more harm than good, particularly for students of color, by creating a climate and culture that is intimidating and trauma-inducing. For this reason, the Task Force should recommend that resources directed at funding SROs and similar police presence in schools instead be directed at ensuring police are appropriately trained for interacting with youth

Moreover, having police in schools does not make schools any safer and it leads to more arrests of young people, especially Latino and Black youth. According to a recent comprehensive report by Connecticut Voices for Children, the presence of SROs in schools does *not* make schools safer for our students nor does it lead to tangible beneficial outcomes for students.³ In fact, we have learned that the presences of SROs in school actually makes Latino students six (6) times more likely to be referred to arrests and Black students three (3) times more likely than they would be if they were in schools without SROs.⁴ National research resulted in similar findings that the use of SROs in school cannot be directly linked to improving school safety, and instead leads increased criminalization of youth.⁵

What is more, youth who experience a police arrest in school are more likely to be excluded from school because of discipline, less likely to graduate and more likely to end up deeper into our justice system. In addition to increasing student arrests, the presence of SROs in schools is also linked to increased exclusionary discipline from school. These factors fuel the school to prison pipeline pushing more students out of our schools and into the justice system.

A former client of CCA provides an example of the result of police presence in schools. Think of Angela, a 16 year old Latin teenager with an emotional disability who attended a public high school with an SRO. After a particularly trying day, Angela engaged in verbal altercation with another peer, and then attempted to abscond the building. After a chase, the SRO 'caught' and put his hands on her, leading Angela to black out and have a more violent reaction. Angela was arrested as a result, and also recommended for suspension and expulsion. Through advocacy, we were able to help ensure that she received a referral to the juvenile review board and used her special education protections to ensure that she was not expelled from school. However, had Angela not had the benefit of these interventions she could have ended up with a juvenile conviction and an expulsion, two steps closer to dropping out and not finishing high school.

2019), p. 5; *see also* Amanda Geller, et al., "Aggressive Policing and the Mental Health of Young Urban Men," 104(12) *Am. J. Pub. Health* 2321–2327 (2014); Amber J. Landers et al., "Police Contacts and Stress Among African American College Students," 81 *Am. J. Orthopsychiatry* 72 (2011).

² Theriot, M.T., et al., "School Resource Officers and students' feelings of safety at school," *Youth Violence & Juvenile Justice Journal*, pp 130-46.

³ Stokes-Hudson, p. 19-20.

⁴ *Id.*, pp. 14-18.

⁵ Gottfredson, Denise C., et. al, "Effects of School Resource Officers on school crime and responses to school crime," *Criminology & Public Policy: Special Issue Article*, 2020:19:905-940.

Police-School Memoranda of Agreement and enhanced police training should be used to ensure appropriate treatment by youth by police. Currently, statute requires that there be a memorandum of agreement (MOAs) between police departments and school districts in any city or town where SROs are used, the purpose of which is to govern SRO interaction with students. Even with the dissolution of SROs, these MOAs are still relevant. CCA would request that the use of these MOAs be expanded and required for all cities and towns to govern police response in schools, whether it be for a mental health or behavioral crisis or a suspected crime. In addition to ensuring that there will be a graduated response by the police, these MOAs will enhance police accountability by outlining for the public the steps that should be taken in mitigating issues that arise with students in school.

CCA appreciates the Task Force providing this opportunity to give input on its recommendations to the legislature regarding police accountability and transparency. As outlined in this testimony, we believe an additional important component of police accountability that should be addressed by the Task Force is the presence of police in our schools. In summary, CCA would urge the Task Force to consider additional recommendations which would serve to remove SROs from Connecticut's schools and at the same time expand the requirement for Police-School MOAs to be used to govern police response to all of Connecticut's towns and municipalities, regardless of the presence of SROs. These measures will minimize the criminalization of youth of color and also enhance police accountability when police are asked to go into our schools.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions, concerns or comments. I can be reached via email at: mhalm@cca-ct.org or via phone at 860-566-0764.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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