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Police Accountability and Transparency Task Force
Listening Session

Good morning members of the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force. My name is Christina Quaranta and I am the Deputy Director for the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. CTJJA is a Youth/Adult Partnership committed to ending the criminalization of youth by disrupting and dismantling the systems that funnel our young people into the justice systems.

I am testifying today to ask that your final recommendations call for the replacement of school resource officers in schools with the appropriate resources and support that students, teachers, and administrators need. Police do not make schools safer, but instead result in arrests, particularly of Black and brown students, almost always for minor offenses.¹

A recent social media post from the ACLU of CT states that:

Police in schools add to the existing over-criminalization of students of color and students with disabilities. The numbers are clear: in Connecticut, in-school arrests by police are hurting Black and Latinx kids most. Kids need counselors and support, not cops.

We believe that school systems and cities must be funded appropriately to be able to respond with urgency and care when a situation warrants a response. A common misconception about school resources officers is that the purpose of a SRO is to help the other adults in the building protect the students, to develop relationships with the young people who attend the school, and provide a safe environment for students to learn. Unfortunately, the impact of officers in schools does the opposite.

SROs do not increase better academic outcomes, they actually could do the complete opposite. When a child is arrested, or suspended based on the referral of the SRO, it is only pouring more into that achievement gap for Black and brown kids, because children are not present in classrooms where they should be. CT Voices for Children

¹ <https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/edu19SchoolResourceExecSummary.pdf>

looked at CT data in a recent report and found that SROs didn't have an impact on academic outcomes for better or worse.²

Relying on police officers to deal with behavioral issues and other incidents is setting up the police officer and the young person to fail. A child whose behavior is out of control versus one who is signifying a mental health crisis need two different and specialized interventions. These interventions may look like intensive mental health supports or a restorative justice circle. Either way, a response from a police officer is not warranted. It's critical for the state of Connecticut to listen to what young people, families, and communities need and focus on meeting those needs to end on the reliance of police.

Black and brown children are likely to have first or second hand experience with law enforcement outside of school, having SROs in schools may be understandably traumatizing. After the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and all of the other Black and brown people who have been brutally murdered by police, youth are terrified, frustrated and confused. Seeing a police car in front of their school and an officer within the halls can negatively impact their ability to participate in education and learn.

As Eve Ewing wrote in the August 2020 issue of *Vanity Fair*, "Indeed, for American policing to function, physical assault is an important tool, but as important is intimidation - the *threat* of physical assault and the psychological terror it engenders."

SROs placement in schools can be traumatizing for both youth and family. School resource officers do not contribute to public safety. Due to the presence of school resource officers, young people have a much higher chance of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. The rate at which kids of color are being arrested, as opposed to their white classmates is disproportionate. Even one contact with the juvenile justice system increases the likelihood of a child becoming incarcerated later in life. Take a moment to ask yourself what one interaction with an adult that was equipped to meet that child's needs would bring.

Black and brown youth are oftentimes funneled into the system, by inadequate usage of SROs for minor infractions such as talking back, being out of uniform, fighting, sleeping in class, etc. Nationally, Black and brown students are at a greater risk of being arrested and referred to law enforcement than their white counterparts. (Approximately 3 times more likely). In Connecticut, the average arrest rate of Latino students at schools with an SRO was six times greater than the average arrest rate of Latino students at schools

² <https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/edu19SchoolResourceReport.pdf>

without an SRO. That was after taking into account school size, student demographics and the socio-economic status of the community the school is in.³

An investment in SROs is an example of investing in the criminalization of youth. CTJJA calls on Connecticut to stop criminalizing youth for their behavior. Instead of funding school resource officers and other punitive responses, it's time to invest in what the young people, their families, and communities say that they need. In our recent report, [*Ending the Criminalization of Youth: One Investment at a Time*](#), we call on the state of Connecticut to invest in solutions that promote community well being *and* public safety. Schools need to work to be creative in thinking of how to work with young people who have experienced trauma or who are just having a hard time. Invest in trauma based services. Invest in programs like Credible Messengers, Youth Advocate Programs, Cure Violence. Invest in youth success.

Recently, Durham Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson said, "The safest communities don't have the most cops; they have the most resources." I'd argue that "the safest SCHOOLS don't have the most cops; they have the most resources." That sentence sums up what I'd like you to leave here having heard from me today.