



**HB1089 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – EXPANSION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
AND PROHIBITION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (POLICE–FREE SCHOOLS ACT)**

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WAYS AND COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB1089 Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police–Free Schools Act)**. This bill repeals certain provisions of law relating to the establishment of the Baltimore City School Police Force. It prohibits a local school system from contracting with law enforcement agencies to station police officers or other law enforcement officers with arrest authority in schools or on school property. The bill prohibits a local school system from establishing its own police force. It alters certain functions and duties of the Maryland Center for School Safety to require the Center to analyze data on school security employees and adequate certain law enforcement coverage, and to submit a report regarding data on school security employees. The bill also alters the role of the School Safety Subcabinet to ensure that it promotes interagency efforts that support safe schools for all students, school staff, parents, and community members in a manner that minimizes school exclusion and justice system involvement for students. It adds several new members to the School Safety Subcabinet. The bill replaces references in law to “school resource officers” with “school security employees” for the purposes of training and data collected by the Maryland Center for School Safety. It requires the Center to identify when restraint or force should ever be used by a school security employee and when it is appropriate to call law enforcement to a school. The bill further provides an appropriation of \$10 million in fiscal year 2023 and each year thereafter to provide grants to local school systems to help expand the availability of school-based mental health staff and services, expanding restorative practices, developing community schools, and developing trauma-informed schools. The bill also requires local school systems to report on specified information related to the use of grant funds.

AACPS recognizes the importance of promoting the positive mental health of all students through the development of impactful relationships and by teaching resilience. Student mental health is of particular importance during this time when AACPS students are faced with a global health pandemic and social unrest. School counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, pupil personnel workers, and school nurses collaborate with staff, parents/guardians, and the community to overcome barriers to learning. In 2019, AACPS, in collaboration with the Anne Arundel County Government, created The Anne Arundel Mental Health Task Force to examine, through a countywide lens, ways to address the increased mental health needs of children and adolescents in Anne Arundel County. The Task Force recently issued a report with recommendations which cover several key areas, including discrimination, bias, and cultural barriers; lack of access to resources and mental health providers; mental health stigma; poverty; social media; and trauma. AACPS is committed to continued collaboration with the County and stakeholders to continue to help address the mental health needs of our County’s youth.

While this legislation would provide much needed funding to help ensure more mental health professionals in schools and AACPS supports this, AACPS has concerns with the provisions in this bill that would eliminate SROs from public schools. We are concerned about the unintended consequences that may result from the exclusion of SROs from school buildings. Such an exclusion would eliminate the relationship building among SROs, students, and school staff and could pose school safety concerns. As such, this exclusion would eliminate the many contributions SROs make to school safety.

AACPS recognizes the contributions SROs are making in schools across the State to benefit school climate, culture, and safety. We also recognize the need to pursue expanded training of SROs, principals, behavioral health staff, and teachers on the best classroom and school-based practices to maintain safe and supportive schools conducive to learning. Accordingly, AACPS has supported legislation over the last few years, including this year (HB522 Public Schools - School Resource Officers - Prohibited Conduct), to prohibit SROs from unilaterally enforcing discipline-related school policies, rules, regulations, or procedures to ensure that SROs do not make determinations regarding student discipline. HB522 is aligned with Maryland's training program for SROs and, therefore, the policies and procedures that should already be in place regarding the appropriate role of SROs as it relates to students, educators, and administrators, and student disciplinary actions.

AACPS also supported the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 which required the development of a comprehensive curriculum for all SROs and any other designated school security personnel. The multi-faceted role of SRO's is evident in the outline of the 40-hour, 5-day, mandatory curriculum for all SROs and school security staff. We continue to support comprehensive training for SROs.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB1089.