

Position Statement on School Resource Officers (SROs)

The Executive Board of the County Council of PTAs (CCPTA) is adopting this Position Statement in response to the SRO Work Group Community outreach session that took place on January 13, 2021. The Executive Board is mindful that the CCPTA's membership has divergent views on whether SROs should be in schools. Some members object to any routine police presence, believing that students are less safe. Other members believe that police play a positive mentoring role and contribute to safety.

What unites all of our members is that we want kids to both BE as safe as possible and FEEL as safe as possible.¹

Some of our members believe that police meaningfully contribute to safety and deterrence of crime, including through the one-on-one relationships that SROs build with students, which yield information, provide positive role models, and assist vulnerable children. However, our members are not expecting SROs to be the only method of crime deterrence, or even the most important one.

School shooting research has revealed that police are fallible – just as we saw during the school shooting in Parkland, Florida where the SRO abandoned his post. After looking at ten years of incidents, researchers found no empirical data that having a police officer present in a school limits or prevents school shootings.² Our members who view SROs positively have nonetheless also asked how complementary safety tools can be deployed to make our schools safer.

In the past, the CCPTA has begged APS for physical safety retrofits to bolster safety. We have advocated to APS facilities staff for the installation of public entrance vestibules and classroom door locks that can be locked from the inside. APS approved these measures, but over a five year timeframe, ending in 2024. **We believe that the installation of appropriate vestibules and door locks needs to be a higher priority.**

Also, no single SRO can monitor the location of 1000 smart phones in a building at one time. APS does not currently provide all staff and students of all ages with lockable bins to secure their personal belongings, including during extracurricular activities, in order to reduce easy opportunities for property theft. **We believe that APS budgets should be supportive of lockable bins as a common sense strategy of crime deterrence, recognizing that many student-police interactions arise out of property crimes.**

Secondly, some of our members believe that police actually make students less safe. Study after study reveals that arrest rates of children are disproportionate to population rates based on racial and sex characteristics.³ For example, nationwide, Black girls make up 17% of the school population, but they make up 43% of the students who are arrested and referred to law enforcement for prosecution.⁴ A

¹ The perception of school as an unsafe space can negatively affect learning. See, e.g., Virginia PTA's Resolution to Limit Frequency of Lock Down Drills, available at:

<https://www.vapta.org/documents/legislative-library/resolutions/2386-2020-01-lockdown-drills-approved>.

² <https://justiceforwardva.com/police-in-schools>.

³ See, e.g., Virginia PTA's Position Statement on Advancing Equity and Diversity and concern about the inequities in disciplinary referrals, available at:

https://www.vapta.org/images/Advocacy/Equity_and_Diversity_Position_2020-06-18.pdf.

⁴ <https://justiceforwardva.com/police-in-schools>

2017 Georgetown law report⁵ described the symptoms of this problem as the erasure of Black girls' childhoods. Little Black girls are viewed as needing less protection, less nurturing, and viewed as being more engaged in adult matters than little white girls. The result of this "adultification" process is that SROs apply greater use of force, harsher penalties, and more punitive exercise of discretion against Black girls, which is most pronounced from the ages of 5-14. **We ask that the SRO Work Group explicitly address the impacts of "adultification" and other erroneous biases on certain student populations.**

Finally, the current MOU fails our community because its procedural protections are an illusion. Page 5 of the MOU contains a long list of procedural protections covering interviews and investigations. It promises privacy for the student, and promises parents that every attempt will be made by the principal to inform them that their child was interviewed about criminal activity. It promises strict adherence to Constitutional rights. But there's a big loophole, because as long as the principal is the one asking questions with the SRO standing nearby, then these protections aren't formally triggered.

The combination of a principal asking the questions and a sworn law enforcement officer with a gun and a badge doing the listening is totally confusing to students, and it undermines the purpose of even having procedural protections in the first place. APS cannot in good conscience preserve a document that misleads parents about what they can expect to happen. **We ask that APS address in some manner the loophole of using principals to act as surrogates of police in order to avoid procedural protections.** APS could inform the community about the loophole, or eliminate it by, for example, requiring that principals refrain from asking questions of students in the presence of an SRO until after the SRO has commenced an "interview" or an "investigation" of the student. The loophole that allows evasion of the procedural protections that would otherwise apply under the MOU cannot continue to go unaddressed.

Additionally, we are mindful that Arlington's recent decision to adopt body-worn cameras can be an important tool to provide context and nuance of any interaction between SROs and students with disabilities, who are also a population with disproportionately high arrest rates – three times higher than those of non-disabled peers.⁶ Yet if the current MOU loophole is allowed to persist, this tool becomes pointless. If an SRO decides to remain silent to evade the requirement to turn on the camera, there will be no recording that could help reconstruct the events that took place leading up to a student with a disability being arrested. **We ask that you take into consideration whether this MOU will make the investment in body worn cameras moot because the cameras will not have to be turned on and used under real world conditions to provide procedural protections to students with disabilities.**

Adopted by the Executive Board of the Arlington CCPTA

February 8, 2021

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<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>