

Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Room S 128, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Richard Shelby
Senate Appropriations Committee
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Room S 128, the Capitol
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July 15, 2013

RE: Funding for School Policing

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Ranking Member Shelby, and Subcommittee Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our opposition to any funding increases for school resource officer programs in the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill.

Maintaining a safe learning environment is critical to the well-being of our nation's communities and the health and success of our students. We believe the federal government plays a meaningful role in supporting school safety. We support the Subcommittee's interest in providing funds to assist schools to develop emergency management plans. Furthermore, we commend the entire Appropriations Committee for favorably reporting out of Committee a Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHSE) bill that includes funding for school-based mental health supports and best practices for improving school discipline and the learning environment. These are cost-effective, evidence-based approaches for preventing violence that will make a number of students and communities safer.

The Subcommittee should not increase funding for school police. While school-based policing was meant to address only the most serious threats to students' safety, too often, these practices have led to police involvement in a broad range of school issues and conflicts that are not of a serious criminal or violent nature. In practice, most school police spend a significant portion of their time responding to minor, nonviolent infractions—children who have drawn on desks or talked back to teachers, for example—rather than behaviors that seriously threaten school safety. The result has been the criminalization of youth - particularly students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ youth - for school behavior that can be more effectively addressed by educators and parents.

Research suggests that relying on justice-system interventions to address school-based matters has a deleterious effect on both individual students and their schools. A first-time arrest doubles the odds a student will drop out, while a first court appearance quadruples them. Perhaps saddest of all, research shows no proven gains in school safety from stationing police in schools. In fact,

involving police in matters of school discipline can serve to alienate students and curtail the very trust and communication most needed to ensure school safety.

Thankfully, our improved understanding of the harms of school policing has prompted districts like Los Angeles, Denver and Baltimore and states like Colorado, Delaware, Florida, and Maryland to reduce police involvement in school matters. And a wave of recent state and local school discipline reforms has many communities primed to implement the supportive services included in the Committee's LHHSE bill.

We are gravely concerned that an increase in federal funding to support the presence of school resource officers will start this cycle of overreliance on school policing over again. We must ensure that a legislative solution does not result in children being punished more severely in the name of school safety. Therefore, we do not support any possibilities for increased SRO funding in the Subcommittee's bill, be it through the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring grants, the President's proposed Comprehensive School Safety Program, or any other source. Instead, we urge the Subcommittee to devote these funds to further supporting the best practices highlighted above.

In public schools that already have a law enforcement presence, lawmakers and school administrators must put appropriate safeguards in place to ensure that officers do what they are intended to do—prevent serious crimes—not usurp the role of educators by engaging in routine school discipline. Therefore, we support efforts to better define and narrow the role that existing SROs play, by limiting their responsibilities to responding to serious criminal matters and strictly prohibiting their involvement in school disciplinary incidents and by supporting better training requirements for any police or security stationed in schools. We also recommend the reduction or elimination of federal funds where there is overuse and/or racially disproportionate use of law enforcement to respond to student misbehavior and a denial of renewal grants where the federal government identifies persistent police overreliance or racial disparities.

We thank the Subcommittee for their work on this issue and hope to continue to work with you as we develop meaningful reforms to improve the safety and climate in our nation's schools.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Matthew Cregor at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (mcregor@naacpldf.org); Deborah J. Vagins at the ACLU Washington Legislative Office (dvagins@aclu.org); Kaitlin Banner at The Advancement Project (kbanner@advancementproject.org); or Christopher Scott at the Open Society Policy Center (christopher.scott@opensocietyfoundations.org).

Sincerely,

Action Communication and Education Reform, Inc., Duck Hill, MS
Activists with a Purpose Plus, Grenada, MS
Advance Youth Leadership Power at Access Living, Chicago, IL
Advancement Project
Advocates for Children of New York
American Civil Liberties Union

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Anti-Defamation League
Baltimore Safe and Sound Campaign
CADRE (Community Asset Development Re-defining Education), Los Angeles, CA
Campaign for Youth Justice
Center for Community Alternatives, New York
Center for Law and Education
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Citizens for a Better Greenville, Greenville, MS
Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, Tunica, MS
Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), New York, NY
Dignity in Schools Campaign
Education Justice Alliance, Wake County, NC
Education Law Center
Education Law Center - PA
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
Gwinnett STOPP, Gwinnett County, GA
Illinois Safe Schools Alliance
International Institute for Restorative Practices
JustChildren, Legal Aid Justice Center, Virginia
Justice for Families, Maryland
Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana
Juvenile Law Center
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens
Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Center for Youth Law
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Network for Youth
New York Law School Racial Justice Project
Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Inc., Holmes County, MS
Open Society Policy Center
Paterson Education Organizing Committee, Paterson, NJ
Power U Center for Social Change, Miami, FL
POWER-PAC (Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew—Policy Action Council),
Chicago, IL
Project NIA
Public Advocates, California
Public Counsel Law Center, California
Pumphouse Projects, New York
Racial Justice Initiative of TimeBanks, USA

Restorative Schools Vision Project, California
Sistas and Brothas United, Bronx, NY
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
Southern Disability Law Center
Southern Echo, Inc., Jackson, Miss.
Southern Poverty Law Center
Student Advocacy Center of Michigan
Sunflower County Parents and Students, Indianola, MS
Teachers Unite, New York, NY
Texas Appleseed
The EdLaw Project, Massachusetts
The Sentencing Project
The Woman of God's Design Ministry, Chicago, IL
Took Crowell Institute for Youth & the Juvenile and Special Education Law Clinic, University
of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP), Washington, DC
Youth Innovative Movement Solutions, Tupelo, MS