



**Testimony for the Baltimore City House Delegation
HB1373 – Baltimore City – School Resource Officers - Firearms
March 15, 2019**

Position: OPPOSE

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Good morning, Chair Glenn and members of the Baltimore City House Delegation. I am Dana Vickers Shelley, the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties of Maryland.

We are concerned that a dangerous and unnecessary bill to allow school police to carry loaded guns in Baltimore City Schools during the school day has been revived and gotten this far. The overwhelming voices of the Baltimore City public school community – families, students, and teachers – have made it clear that the presence of guns in schools inhibits children’s ability to learn and succeed.

Wednesday, a Baltimore City student testified in the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee opposing Senate Bill 884, a similar bill Senator Jennings introduced seeking to authorize City school police to carry loaded guns. He said that when he gets to school, he feels free. But if the police officer in his school had a gun, he would feel scared, like the way he feels in his community with the police presence. The ACLU of Maryland joins this student, and the school community, in calling on Baltimore’s Delegates to vote NO on House Bill 1373 once and for all.

There must be safe spaces for our children to learn and prepare for success. A decision to arm school police officers would in fact ignore what children actually need, as well as the many, many ways to create true safety while they are in school. Guns in schools is not the answer.

There is a lack of meaningful data that arming school police increases overall safety or improves relationships within school communities. The presence of guns in schools negatively impacts children’s ability to learn. They do not keep children safer.

We ask that you stop the disturbing national trend of bolstering police when communities are at their most vulnerable, and resist the calls from the Fraternal Order of the Police with a reactive decision to arm school police. Guns are not the answer. Guns in schools do not keep children safer.

Our children need a positive school climate of strong relationships in the classroom – in the halls, and in their neighborhoods. We must work to fully fund our schools so they are able to fix broken security systems that are already in place. We must work together and direct our attention, energy, and resources toward creating the environment that will lead to safe schools, more learning, and better outcomes for all Baltimore City children.

Building a positive school climate must be conceived, planned, and implemented holistically in each community. This happens by working every single day to foster trust and maintain productive relationships within the school community and with the broader community outside school doors. This happens by supporting community school models, and by adopting a trauma-informed approach. We must support the ability of school staff to identify students impacted by traumatic stress, who then can support students in understanding and managing their emotions. School staff need support and resources to respond to students through restorative practices when there is a conflict.

Trauma-informed models include skills to work with students, families, and other members of the school community with sensitivity. We at the ACLU of Maryland have advocated for restorative practices and trauma-informed care to include families and everyone in the school building and community. This focus on relationship building is key to creating a positive climate. We must make the time and provide the resources to do this right. Students deserve a setting that does not normalize guns. Now is the time to think about the most effective ways to do that.

We are calling on you as Baltimore City leaders to say “NO” to authorizing Baltimore City Schools police to carry loaded guns inside schools. Please reject House Bill 1373 once and for all. We urge you to focus your leadership on building positive learning environments for Baltimore’s next generation – our children – and to make sure they have the resources needed to sustain a positive school climate.

Our children are worth it and deserve nothing less.

Thank you, Madam Chair and Delegates.