



501 3rd Street, NW · 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20001
T 202.467.4900 · F 202.467.4949
www.childrenslawcenter.org

Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
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Performance Oversight Hearing:
Metropolitan Police Department

Danielle Robinette
Policy Attorney
Children's Law Center

Good afternoon, Chairperson Allen, and members of the Committee. My name is Danielle Robinette, and I am a Policy Attorney at Children's Law Center.¹ I am testifying today on behalf of Children's Law Center, which fights so every DC child can grow up with a stable family, good health, and a quality education. With almost 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, Children's Law Center reaches 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year.

As part of our work on behalf of DC children and youth, Children's Law Center is a member of the Police Free Schools Coalition. Many of our young clients have had harmful, and even traumatizing, experiences with the police in their schools. Children's Law Center believes that schools should be welcoming places where students feel safe. The presence of Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers in our schools perpetuates harm and hinders efforts to create positive school climates. For these reasons, Children's Law Center, along with many coalition partners, have advocated for the dissolution of the School Safety Division (SSD) with MPD and the investment of dollars to expand supportive services for students.

The Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Support Act of 2021 included a provision that would gradually phase out School Resource Officers (SROs) and would dissolve the SSD by July 1, 2025.² The reasoning behind this gradual phase out was to allow for schools to transition gradually from the use of SROs to the implementation of supportive services.³

The Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Support Act of 2021 requires that, by July 1, 2022, the School Safety Division's sworn and civilian staff is not to exceed 60 personnel.⁴ This represents a reduction of 31 employees from FY20's sworn staffing levels.⁵ With less than four months until the first reduction in SROs is due to occur, MPD has not publicly shared how the agency plans to comply with the statutory requirement. According to the Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education, MPD plans to change the way in which SROs are assigned to schools.⁶ Rather than be assigned to schools in a cluster beat model, each officer will be assigned a specific set of schools.⁷ It is unclear if schools have been consulted on the redistribution plan or if school leaders are aware what the plan is.⁸ If school leaders have not been meaningfully involved in planning for the phase out, we are concerned they may not be preparing to put into place the supportive services needed to replace SROs.

Children's Law Center reached out to MPD for more information regarding their planning, but the Department did not provide any details as to their preparations.⁹ We strongly encourage the Committee to press MPD for clear answers regarding their planning for the SRO phase out. While the Budget Support Act identifies annual deadlines for MPD, the Committee must use their oversight role to ensure that the phase out is being planned and implemented with transparency. We also recommend that the Committee's oversight of the phase out ensure that there is an analysis of any potential racial or socio-economic impact of the new distribution of SROs across the District.

As we testified last year, the removal of SROs must be paired with an investment in programming and supports that will improve school climates and create safe schools without the need for police.¹⁰ Education sector and community stakeholders cannot appropriately target supports and services without foundational transparency from MPD. A failure to plan and engage with the full spectrum of education stakeholders – including school leaders, parents, out-of-school time programs, and safe passage providers – is likely to undermine the project of creating safe schools.

With thorough oversight from the Committee and collaboration with school communities, we can ensure that schools have the behavioral health supports, robust safe passage, and comprehensive restorative justice programming. Failure to plan for the needs of student will lead to preventable safety concerns. We urge the Committee to ensure that proper planning is underway at MPD and that school communities are actively engaged in the transition away from police in schools and toward welcoming, positive school climates.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions.

¹ Children’s Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a stable family, good health, and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians, and families turn to us to advocate for children who are abused or neglected, who aren’t learning in school, or who have health problems that can’t be solved by medicine alone. With almost 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC’s poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children.

² See DC Code § 5-132.02(e)

³ See *Committee Mark-Up: Report and Recommendations FY22 Budget*, Before the Comm. on the Judiciary & Pub. Safety, D.C. Council, (June 30, 2021) (statement of Councilmember Charles Allen, Chair, Comm. on the Judiciary & Pub. Safety) (responding to concerns about withdrawing SROs, “while there certainly were calls to, say, immediately eliminate the division, because we wanted to make sure those pieces are in place, that’s why you see the step-down approach that’s spread out over several years which allows us to work with MPD and work with other partners for that transition.”)

⁴ See DC Code § 5-132.02(e)(1)

⁵ See Robert Contee, Metropolitan Police Department, “Responses to Fiscal Year 2020 Performance Oversight Questions,” at 154 (April 26, 2021), available at: <https://dccouncil.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IPS-Performance-Oversight-Responses-2021-MPD.pdf> (noting in response to question 39 that the SSD’s sworn staffing was composed of one commander, two lieutenants, nine sergeants, and 79 SROs – totaling 91 sworn personnel, but does not note whether there are any civilian personnel).

⁶ See email from Clara Botstein, Director of Legislative and Governmental Affairs, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, to Danielle Robinette, Policy Attorney, Children’s Law Center (Feb. 4, 2022, 09:40 EST) (on file with author).

⁷ See Metropolitan Police Department, “School Safety and Security in the District of Columbia: SY 2019-2020,” at 2, available at: https://mpdc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mpdc/publication/attachments/MPD%20School%20Safety%20Annual%20Report_School%20Year%202019-2020%20Final.pdf (explaining that SROs are deployed in a combination of short beats and clusters in which each short beat consists of no more than four schools with a deployment of up to four SROs and the remaining schools in each police district will be in a cluster with SROs who will check in daily and provide safety support).

⁸ Inquiries were sent by email to DCPS Deputy Chancellor Dr. Amy Maisterra and DCPS Chief of School Improvement and Supports Dr. Bren Elliott; however, no response was received in time for this hearing.

⁹ See email from Chanel Dickerson, Assistant Chief, Youth and Family Engagement Bureau, Metropolitan Police Department, to Danielle Robinette, Policy Attorney, Children’s Law Center (Feb. 9, 2022, 06:30 EST) (on file with author).

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Metropolitan Police Department*, Performance Oversight Hearing Before the Comm. on the Judiciary & Pub. Safety, D.C. Council, (Mar. 11, 2021) (testimony of Danielle Robinette, Policy Attorney, Children’s Law Center), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CLC_MPD-Oversight-Testimony_FINAL.pdf