

Friday, March 19, 2021

Deborah Brown
26 Parkman Street , #1
Brookline, MA 02446

Brookline School Committee
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445

Re: Removing Police Resource Officers from Brookline Schools

Dear david_pearlman@psbma.org:

I am writing to ask your support in removing the school resource officers (SRO) from the Brookline schools. You have demonstrated real leadership in a number of areas and on a variety of issues. That leadership is again called for. How many young people have you had to represent, because of problems that for others would have been youthful indiscretions? SROs make it harder to be the kid, especially kid of color to have a youthful indiscretion without a profound negative outcome. Now, you can help to minimize such concerns.

“The mission of Brookline High School is to develop capable, confident life-long learners who contribute to their community, participate thoughtfully in democracy, and succeed in a diverse and evolving global society.” You cannot achieve such a mission if the town is putting an unnecessary burden on a large portion of the student body. What we have to accept is that police at schools likely create criminals. Moreover, there is little data that demonstrates any security benefits for Brookline. Small offences have the potential to become crimes.

I have heard students and families of color object to the program in far greater numbers than people support the program.

SROs carry weapons.

Law enforcement on campus serves no legitimate purpose and does substantial harm to mostly students of color. All students are negatively impacted and changing the location of the program and having them wear different “uniforms” will not change the reality that you have police officers at schools. I cannot pretend to understand why the SROs were introduced to Brookline schools given the manner in which it occurred. Making policy decisions that have a direct impact on students and families deserved a public airing. Even if you could argue that there was a point in time when SROs were needed, that reason was not tailored to fit Brookline’s uniqueness or has passed. Instead, the placement was likely predicated on access to funds and tragic school shootings.

If a core value for the Brookline schools is offering an open and curious environment, the SROs negate this.

“Opponents of school police point to [research showing](#) that the presence of police in schools can lead to negative outcomes for black and Latino students, who are arrested and disciplined at higher rates than their peers. For those students, interactions with school police are often their introduction to the criminal justice system and the beginning of what has been dubbed the “school-to-prison pipeline,” the national trend of students being funneled from public schools to incarceration.”

They found that schools with SROs recorded larger numbers of serious crimes committed by students that merited charges or their expulsion.

The results at first glance seemed to support the premise that SROs helped to deter violent student crime by identifying more criminal behavior. But in fact, it revealed that police and educators had sharply divergent ideas of what constituted dangers to school security, and how to handle them.¹

“[Our] survey and interview data suggest that the increase in school disciplinary offenses due to increased SRO staffing levels observed in our study is probably due at least in part to increased surveillance,” the authors said.

Schools are not safer because police officers are in schools².

Finally, as far back as 2007, academics and advocates alike were questioning SROs³. The ACLU came up with some recommendations that places the authority to have SROs in the hands of school administrators, that SRO’s roles to be limited to real security concerns for students and educators, students, families; and there has to be a process to report wrongdoing by SROs⁴. Brookline does not have a civilian complaint process, which may limit the likelihood of a full problem evaluation.

Clearly there is no legitimate reason to keep SROs in the schools. People are not safer. Some students are stigmatized which leads to marginalization. And even more may have had taken a love of learning. These are tragic outcomes for a school system that asserts that protecting its students is such an important value. Your leadership can put an end to the SRO program.

Thank you in advance for eliminating the SRO program in Brookline Schools.

Deborah Brown

Town Meeting Member

¹ “Students attending high schools that have substantial shares of black or Hispanic students attend schools with a police officer at higher rates than students attending schools with few black and Hispanic students.”

[Urban Wire Crime and JusticeRSS, The blog of the Urban Institute
https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/prevalence-police-officers-us-schools#:~:text=In%20every%20state%2C%20high%20school,school%20with%20a%20police%20officer.](https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/prevalence-police-officers-us-schools#:~:text=In%20every%20state%2C%20high%20school,school%20with%20a%20police%20officer.)

² **Opinion: Putting more cops in schools won’t make schools safer, and it will likely inflict a lot of harm,** Washington Post, Opinion by [Radley Balko](#) Columnist, Feb. 22, 2018 at 4:49 p.m. EST

Part of the reason for this is that, again, violent crime in school is already incredibly low — so low, that looking at actual violent crime statistics is basically useless. School shootings are so rare, there’s just no way to gather a sample size large enough to draw any conclusions. Anecdotally, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School did have a sheriff’s deputy on duty at time of the shooting, [but he never discharged his weapon](#). Would it have been different if there had been four or five or six armed guards? Possibly. But again, we simply don’t have enough of these incidents (thankfully) to say for sure. There’s also a question of public resources, here. Does it make sense to pay a half dozen armed guards to patrol your local school if that school isn’t likely to see a mass shooting for tens of thousands of years?

³ **CRIMINALIZING THE CLASSROOM THE OVER-POLICING OF NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS,** Published March 2007,

https://www.nyclu.org/sites/default/files/publications/nyclu_pub_criminalizing_the_classroom.pdf

⁴ Id. Opinion: Putting more cops in schools won’t make schools safer, and it will likely inflict a lot of harm.

Precinct 1