

Greetings Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, Staff, Members of the Metropolitan Police Department and the viewing public.

I am Bobby Pittman and I appear here today on behalf of the First District Citizens' Advisory Council, Inc., and the communities we advocate for which includes businesses, tenants, residents, and our visitors to the nation's capitol.

We can unequivocally state that the number one issue next to school instruction, is safety, security, and a sense of not having to worry about being attacked, robbed, bullied, sexually assaulted, retaliation or killed when in public schools. In other words, school should be a sanctuary. Free of the problems of home, the streets or anything else. Here a child of any age should be in a safe zone free from victimization of even other children. Right now, that is not the reality we exist in.

We warn you against knee jerk reactions to large groups of people who protest and testify on issues of the day but do not live in the City-State of Washington or vote here. The Council's legislation threatens to increase insurance costs on businesses, residents, and property owners. Your legislative changes will raise the price of medical coverage, car insurance and miscellaneous expenses that the Council's Budget Office has not computed. Your reductions of the police force and school resource officers give the District of Columbia exposure. It also gives you individually and collectively as the Council, exposure. You are officers of the corporation of the District of Columbia. Your actions are jeopardizing the safety of everyone in this city. It is incomprehensible and unfathomable that you seek to dismantle the School Resource Division of the Metropolitan Police Department!

My team can only dumb down and assume you really don't know what happens in schools that are majority black, weighted with many types of disadvantages. This leaves them vulnerable to those with political agendas that serve specialized interests, but not necessarily the interest of those most at risk. The requirement for a police response to majority black schools is ridiculously high, we agree. We think almost everyone would agree that these children are traumatized, their families are traumatized, their neighborhoods are traumatized, so they act out because that's all they have seen. They are the victims of their environments. So here is a basic understanding, a 101 view of schools in each ward of the city where black and brown students are:

1. Your Police Commission compiled data from other jurisdictions that has little or nothing to do with the DCPS and MPD's relationships with children in the DCPS system.
2. Each school environment in DCPS has its unique challenges when it comes to behavioral issues.
3. Before we continue in the critique of your police commission report, we acknowledge that data can be compiled and distributed better. Data as it currently exists is across agencies to include the Metropolitan Police Department. This was a ding your police commission used to assail the lack of response from MPD. Here is the real deal. If the Council of the District of Columbia wants the information that the First District Citizens' Police Advisory Council would also like to have, you need to restore the money taken from MPD's budget. Why, it cost money to have staff to compile data and make it usable to MPD and client entities to include the Council of the District of Columbia. Then there are legislative changes that the Council will need to undertake to allow under privacy and medical laws that agencies can share personal data about minors. Changes to how IEP and 504 plans and discipline are managed is critically important here. All interested groups would be better served if everyone were in the same room with an agreed upon plan for what SRO's can be told about a student who has an IEP/504 plan which will give the SRO procedures that better serve the student and the responding SRO. That's just the beginning, you will need to get amendments under federal law and monies that the District of Columbia receives that allow the sharing of personal data on minors among agencies and allow for compilation of material that will aid in health and safety reforms involving minors.
4. I need to point out that some students have guardians and court appointed attorneys. Then there is **Manifestation determination**. A manifestation determination is when the IEP team looks at whether a child's disability, which can include learning and thinking differences, causes or directly contributes to misbehavior. In other words, is the behavior a "manifestation," or symptom, of the child's learning and thinking differences? If so, more protections apply. To answer this question, the team must look at all relevant information. This includes the current misbehavior, the child's IEP file and any observations. During the process, the IEP team must also check if aspects of the IEP weren't followed. Maybe the student was supposed to get weekly counseling services, but the school kept rescheduling and, as a result, the student acted out. Or perhaps the school didn't follow behavior like letting a child stand during class or leave class to visit a "cool-off" room. This is all extremely complex series of observations and reactions that must be carefully reasoned.

Consider the following:

Here is a snapshot of incidents shared with me from a member of my team who is also a teacher. **THIS IS A FIRSHAND ACCOUNT WITNESSED, IT IS NOT MY STATEMENT:**

- 1. I witnessed a second grader who destroyed the principal's office. The child was out of control knocked over a water tank pulled all the books from the shelves turn everything upside down wipe everything off the desk turns all the furniture in the room over. What do you do to stop the child's behavior? How do you restrain him or her from hurting themselves or someone else?*
- 2. I was trying to find the pictures, but I can't find the pictures of this one boy who used to come in the classroom in the morning and start kicking the desk over the chairs over and grab the girl by her hair and pulled her out the chair and started dragging her on the floor.*
- 3. We also had a fifth grader who brought drugs to school he used to push them for his mom. He went on a playground and buried the drugs because one of the kids told on him. One boy started taking his clothes off in the middle of a lesson. The teacher just stood there in awe.*
- 4. What's the girl's name who went missing I think it was Brianna. Her siblings were adopted by a white couple. The three-year-old picked up a pillow during nap time and tried to beat the boy that was sleeping in his head. A big floor pillow. How are you supposed to stop her?*
- 5. I also think that the SRO should recommend early intervention that has to happen right away and an investigation on how the living conditions are for that child.*

Those comments are from a teacher who cares deeply about children. You will receive other testimonies today from other teachers and administrators who are concerned with the tempest you are considering unleashing on the community at large. Moving on...

Please consider:

- 1. The staff members (Administrations, Teachers, Faculty) of DCPS and the DC Charter schools are reluctant to get involve with physically stopping students from fighting one another for fear of internal investigation and most assuredly Police investigations. These investigations may and have resulted in terminated employment and arrests. Children lie, parents lie. Teachers/Administrators can be in a balancing act when all of the events converge at a moment in time.*

Testimony of the First District Citizens' Advisory Council, Inc. School Security in District of Columbia Public and Public Charter Schools. Wednesday 21 April 2021 www.1dcac.com caconlineall@gmail.com

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2. Fights that happen between students in and around "safe passage" are stopped by the SRO'S, but if there is a brawl between groups of youth, then assistance is elicited from the regular patrol units, which may require several units from 3 or more PSA's. DCPS, DC Charter School employees and contract security cannot leave the school grounds to assist Police with identifying students for the purpose of parental notification, setting up mediations and the issuance of school-based discipline.
3. In cases where Police suspect and/or have been notified that a student is in a home that may be neglectful or a danger, as **mandatory reporters** SRO's contact CFSA, Youth Division, and if directed to SRO's apply for **incident report numbers**. Usually, if it is and/or reaches a critical level, CFSA & Youth Division will respond to the home to assess the situation and possibly remove that child from the home.
4. When properly staffed SRO's will establish better relationships with students, because they can be at schools more. When SRO's are visible, they become someone that children trust and look forward to for safety and security. Our youth are involved in many positive activities all the while attempting to find themselves and solidify their futures. Yet some are involved in Domestic Violence, Murders, Thefts, Car Jackings, Armed Robberies, Assaults, etc..... The SRO plays a critical role in all areas, which prevents arrestable situations, just by being a resource and someone who cares to see them succeed.
5. The Unity in community has not been practice for at least 35yrs, therefore the concept of neighborhoods and violence interrupters staffing Safe Passage and the school, is not attainable until you train the public to be neighborly and supportive of police efforts. The concept your police commission is proposing will create more turmoil in the neighborhoods than anything. If someone other than school staff or MPD put their hands on someone's child, there will be neighborhood fights. These suggested responses are not well thought out and are just a compilation of amalgamated ideas from across the country with no reliable data as to how such concepts would play out in the District of Columbia.

6. It is important to note that SRO and MPD would rather not use their hands on a student if possible. SROs and MPD understand and use verbal persuasion and other tools to get situations calm. It is important to understand that in the moment, children lie or can be manipulated by adults to tell a story about what a SRO, Administrator, Teacher, Aide or someone else has done to them. **This triggers investigations even of the SRO who responded and managed the incident.** This is stressful and has to be handled by trained SROs who can navigate these incidents. These incidents occur every day in DC Public schools! Can you imagine what must be like to address these issues every day.

I conclude this testimony by highlighting what the School Safety Division does, not anecdotal stories. You should know:

1. about Safe Passage and how it works.
2. about Safetrack and how it works.
3. what happens waiting around Metro bus stops and how SRO's, Metro Transit Police, work with DCPS to stagger students leaving different schools so they will not fight or attempt to kill or maim each other. These occurrences stretch from Wilson Senior High School to Anacostia High School.
4. SRO's provide formal outreach officer friendly safety presentations in classrooms.
5. SRO's provide Stranger Safety presentations.
6. SRO's provide Junior police cadets programs at 5 elementary schools.
7. SRO's and Youth Division target 5th graders with a little bit of law enforcement overview. They take children on trips to Mount Vernon and Luray caverns. SRO's have established a **Youth Advisory Council** of approximately 80 students. SRO's invite guest to speak about colleges and inspirational speakers.
8. National Resource Officers Association program began in 2005 and during 2018 the program was reactivated to provide SRO training. SRO's are **selected** from the Department. Everyone can't be an SRO. MPD looks for people who want to be SRO's. That person's background and personnel jacket is reviewed. The individual must have three to five years satisfactory rating from supervisors, 40 hours of training to include **block adolescent brain development training.**

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9. Situations that occurred with **police officers handcuffing children** received media attention and outrage from many of us. We immediately recognized that is not a trauma we want a child to suffer. We immediately knew to contact the Commander of the District where this happened to discuss the situation and to ensure this did not happen in the future. Changes were made Department wide. You should know, these were not SRO. SRO's know better than to take that action, have specialized training, only use restraint when all other methods fail or the security of the child or others come into play. So, to use these events against SRO's is disingenuous. Our Patrol Officers have evolved because of these situations.
10. **SRO's** have participated in cultural awareness training, restorative justice training with the OAG. It should be noted that refresher training for the division has evolved.
11. **No consent searches are not executed** in schools by the Metropolitan Police Department or School Resource Officers. Students are only mirandized by detectives, not by uniformed personnel. That means a review is conducted first and then it is decided amongst the decision makers how best to proceed or to follow up. Example:
 - a) incident that occurred couple of years ago where an elementary school kid brought a gun to school which was an extremely dangerous situation. It is my understanding that in this situation SRO's and Detective consulted with OAG. There was an arrest a few days later but not at school.
 - b) second situation where an elementary school child was involved in a stabbing. The arrest was not made even in that situation. There was review and at that point a follow up, then police effected an arrest outside of the school environment. It is important to note again, that SROs confer with OAG as to how they should proceed. MPD works in collaboration with its partner agencies to make the most appropriate decisions.
 - c) The CAC's review of MPD shows that where possible the agency uses a no scene arrest in schools. How children 12 and under are interacted with by all police agencies is of great concern to all seven CACs. We are not finding the evidence your police commission states in its reports.

Reimagining Policing is always ongoing and should be as our society grows and matures. We also recognize the issues of **Justice** exceeds uniformed police officers or police agencies. The institution of policing and the cultures that derive from being in a police organization. The Justice system has many moving parts. To truly understand policing is to know that policing is both science and art. Your heart must be in policing, not just your mind.

We advocate for compassion, empathy and a love of the community you care for and serve when you accept the uniform of the people of the District of Columbia. We expect our police to be responsive and courteous even when they must make an arrest. Sometimes that is not easy. The same holds true for School Resource Officers. As a community we must work collectively to be better, not point fingers. We expect your police commission to follow the same standards when providing information that we are supposed to accept as facts.

DC Housing has already been sued by the OAG for not providing appropriate police protection. Is the DC City Council next?

Your police commission calls for Violence Interrupters (VI) in schools we agree. However, will VI's have immunity from lawsuits? What happens when the theoretical approach meets reality of the neighborhoods and the VI finds themselves the victim? Just because you are a VI does not mean you can go into every neighborhood, that person will not be safe.

Section III: Back to Normal: Re-establishing Police Free Schools page 67 to page 74 of your police reform commission report outlines some measures that are reasonable and make sense. Much of the report and this section is a missed opportunity to have a balanced report worthy of real discussion. Its clear from the report that students have been used by adults to promote their agenda. That is unfortunate and it is not the view of the greater community when it comes to policing in schools. Many of the references have very little to do with the District of Columbia and is just a list of grievances and options thrown together to make a report. Police advisory councils know their communities. The vast majority of voters in the District of Columbia from Ward 4 to Ward 6 and from Ward 3 to Ward 8 do not support the efforts of defunding, divesting or reallocating the budget of the Metropolitan Police Department.

Your police commission report fails to explain why police are needed in schools; the number of weapons taken from students on a daily basis. The report fails to explain why warrants have increased in schools and the involvement of Administrators and the OAG. **To reduce on scene arrests in schools there is more review and determinations by the OAG before police seek custody orders and warrants.** That is a good thing. Can it be better? Let's have that discussion with everyone in the room. It is clear there is both trauma and talent of the members of your police commission and we can meet in the middle and have adult balanced conversations about what we as the whole community need and want and don't want from our police. Police are citizens of the community also. They are not soldiers or an occupying force as some wish to paint them.

The report does not discuss behavior and how behaviors elicit responses. We almost must be mindful of behavior. The increase in juvenile carjackings and other felonies are not something the Community will overlook. If there are heavily armed police in any school, please tell us where? I can't find one school that has that type of police as detailed in this commission report. Schools are sanctuaries because of the police. The report recommends more psychologists and social workers. We agree. We have been saying this for decades, that the ratio of social worker/clinician to student populations is too low.

The report does not detail how DCPS would find and retain these employees. There is already a critical shortage of personnel like this and an even higher need due to the pandemic. The report fails to address the impact of the pandemic on communities who call the police more than anyone else. Again, there are many missed opportunities in this report and the work of individuals who know better but are clearly pushing an agenda. We can do much better. The 1D CAC is working on a complete response to the commission's report and we will share that with you later.

Thank you for allowing us to share what we know is true. We look forward to working with you on behalf of all people in the District of Columbia including those who have not had the best interactions with police, whether MPD or other agencies. We welcome everyone to the discussion, that is how we will grow.