



Thank you, Chairman Mendolson and the council for initiating this conversation around this important topic. The current climate that exists in our nation, has fueled concern about and distrust of law enforcement agencies. The call for reform is loud and clear. While it is true that police reform is needed, we must consider that the school resource officer is a unique entity that is a vital part of our school communities. In the recent past, the SRO's role has been maligned by sensationalized social media and news media with a focus on unique incidents that titillate and enflame emotions. For the past 20 years I have worked in DC schools and have come to the realization that the SRO is crucial to school safety and supportive part of our school and community.

The role of the SRO is not discipline in the school and was never designed to be a part of the discipline structure of a school. Schools have teachers, deans and administrators whose role is to create and maintain a school culture that is safe and supportive for all staff and students. There have been many occasions in our schools when the SRO has been involved in discipline issues and this inevitably creates issues and fosters mistrust between the police and the students and families.

Let's look at the title of the role – School Resource Officer. By definition, a resource is drawn upon to help an organization function effectively. A resource is an asset. The SRO is a school's asset; a link between the school and the community. At a time when young people mistrust the police, the SRO creates a much-needed bridge of communication. SROs develop relationships with students and are often able to get ahead of situations before they escalate. SROs become mentors to our children, representing someone in authority that they can speak to about issues in schools and in their communities. SROs provide vital information to schools about community concerns, enabling school administrations to create safe spaces for students and staff. As a community resource, SROs have relationships with the families and are able to have discussions about their concerns thus facilitating trust.

Are all SROs created equal? Of course, they are not. So, as we consider law enforcement reform, we must give serious thought to training for SROs and expectation setting in schools. When we have concerns about teacher or staff performance, we provide support and improvement plans before making decisions to expel them from the school. Let's give our SROs the same consideration. Let's provide appropriate training and keep this valuable asset in our schools.