

BILL: Senate Bill 245
TITLE: Public Schools - School Resource Officers - Prohibited Conduct
DATE: January 27, 2021
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 245, due to the severe restrictions on the ability of school resource officers (SROs) to fulfill their professional role in providing critically important school security related services.

By excluding SROs from school buildings until called by administrators to respond to emergency situations, MABE is concerned about the unintended negative consequences of limiting the daily involvement and relationship building among SROs, students, and staff. This separation would eliminate the contributions of the SRO to school safety; contributions made possible by virtue of their professional training in de-escalation, restorative practices, and their being an integral team member with teachers and school administrators. Another objection is that limiting the SRO to an emergency response role could be expected to lead to SROs who are less well-informed about students and school climate and therefore likely respond in manners less in accord with the school's discipline policies.

MABE recognizes the major contributions SROs are making in schools across the state to benefit school climate, culture, and safety. Therefore, MABE respectfully disagrees with any proposal to unduly restrict the role of SROs. Today, SROs and teachers, principals, and other school personnel are collaborating to provide mentoring, counseling, and instruction concerning appropriate student behaviors, and are responding accordingly to violations of school policy and law. MABE also recognizes the need to pursue expanded training of SROs, principals, behavioral health staff, and teachers on the optimal classroom and school-based practices to maintain safe and supportive schools conducive to learning.

In the 2021 session, MABE is supporting legislation (House Bill 522) to prohibit SROs from unilaterally enforcing discipline-related school policies, rules, regulations, or procedures to ensure that SROs do not make determinations regarding student discipline. This legislation is aligned with Maryland's training program for SROs and therefore the policies and procedures that should already in place regarding the appropriate role of SROs as it relates to students, educators, and administrators, and student disciplinary actions.

The General Assembly is to be commended for the clear direction of the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 to develop a comprehensive curriculum for all SROs and any other designated school security personnel. The multi-faceted role of SRO's is evident in the outline of the 40-hour, 5-day, mandatory curriculum for all SROs and school security staff.

- School Resource Officer: Definition & History of Role
- Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding (MOU) between the police department and the school
- Working Collaboratively with School Administration and Staff
- Restorative Practices in Schools: PBIS, School Based Mediation, and School to Prison Pipeline considerations and Implicit Bias
- Maintaining a Positive School Climate
- Victimization of Youth in Schools - Child Protective Services

- Informal Counseling Roles and Responsibilities
- Disability & Diversity Awareness with a focus on Inclusiveness and Cultural Fluency
- Implicit Bias
- Drug Education and Current Trends in Maryland Schools
- Investigation of Bullying, Threats & Social Media
- Principles of Effective Learning - The Expanding Role of an SRO as an Instructor
- Constructive Interactions with Students - Building Trust and Reducing Fear
- Collaboration and Problem Solving with Stakeholders
- Youth Development, Behavior and Discipline

MABE firmly believes that safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general. Therefore, we continue to urge federal, state, and local governments to ensure adequate and equitable funding for local public school safety and security programs, alternative education programs, and the wide array of behavioral health and public safety services provided by other public and private entities. MABE believes that this holistic approach is essential to maintaining safe schools and access to a high quality education for all of Maryland's students.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 245.