



March 30, 2022

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC, 20004

Re: Police Free Schools in the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget

Dear Councilmembers,

In the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Support Act, the Council agreed to reduce the presence of Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) police officers in schools over five-years by funding fewer officers each year. Mayor Bowser is proposing to repeal this provision and put a halt to the reduction of MPD officers in DC public schools.¹ This move goes against the recommendations of the D.C. Police Reform Commission,² will jeopardize the safety and well-being of the communities and students who are directly impacted by the presence of MPD officers in schools, and subverts the Council's will. We urge you to maintain the planned reduction of police in D.C.'s schools.

Scaling back police presence in schools is essential to protecting young people and prioritizing safe education spaces, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities. Black students are more likely to be arrested at school for normal adolescent behavior than their white counterparts.³ In 2019, 92% of school-based arrests were of Black youth.⁴ In particular, Black girls are five and a half times more likely to be suspended from school than white girls,⁵ and 60% of girls arrested in DC are under the age of fifteen.⁶ Girls, especially girls of color, are often the targets of harsh school disciplinary responses to their behavior due to stereotypes about gender and race.⁷ These statistics are more than just numbers: they indicate the disparities in the types of educational environments students experience. As the D.C. Police Reform Commission explained, "[y]outh of color in particular often do not feel comfortable, valued, or safe in

¹ Martin Austermuhle, *Bowser Uses Budget To Reverse D.C. Council On Police In Schools, Child Welfare Watchdog*, DCIST, (Mar. 21, 2022), <https://dcist.com/story/22/03/21/bowser-dc-budget-revives-fight-over-police-in-schools/>.

² Robert Bobb, et al., DC Police Reform Commission, *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety: A Report of the DC Police Reform Commission*, 18 (2021), <https://dccouncil.us/police-reform-commission-full-report/>.

³ See, e.g., Goff, P.A., Jackson, et.al., *The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (February 2014); Epstein, Rebecca, Jamilia J. Black & Thalia Gonzalez, *Girlhood Interrupted: The erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality (2012).

⁴ The 2019 School Report Card indicates that there were 338 total arrests of students across the District – 312 of the arrests were of Black students and 26 of the arrests were of Latino students. (104 of the arrests were for students with disabilities).

⁵ Adaku Onyeka-Crawford et al., Nat'l Women's Law Ctr., *Let Her Learn: Stopping School Pushout for Girls of Color* 1 (2017).

⁶ Rights4Girls & Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative, *Beyond the Walls: A Look at Girls in DC's Juvenile Justice System*, 21-22, <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2018/03/BeyondTheWalls-Final.pdf>.

⁷ Rights4Girls & Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative, *Beyond the Walls: A Look at Girls in DC's Juvenile Justice System*, 9, <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2018/03/BeyondTheWalls-Final.pdf>.

educational spaces where they are interacting with representatives of a system that generally views Black and brown people as a threat. Indeed, a panel of youth told this commission that instead of fostering safety in school, officers often escalate altercations, create a hostile atmosphere, and cause anxiety among young people by their mere presence, especially since they carry guns.”⁸

One DCPS Student emphasizes that “[h]aving police in schools is a distraction. School is supposed to be a safe place to learn. Police in schools are treated like a tool to maintain power over young people. Schools rely too much on them and are quick to call police and escalate situations when they don’t have to.”

A safe educational environment that protects local youth needs funding for mental health services, violence interrupters, and safe passage, not for more police presence in schools. Black students are more likely to attend schools that are under-resourced, outdated, and over-policed. For example, DCPS neighborhood schools serving mostly Black students are more likely to be deprived of the funding necessary to retain staff including school-based professionals to address mental health and other needs, such as psychologists, nurses, social workers and school counselors. Yet, over the 2020-2021 school year, our city spent close to \$20 million dollars on school security within DCPS alone,⁹ and about \$13.9 million on MPD officers to patrol DCPS and charter schools.¹⁰ The Council can and must invest this money into the growth, future, and safety of our students so that they can learn and thrive.

The Police Free Schools Coalition is advocating for a school system where students can focus on their education instead of their safety and where police are no longer part of students’ every-day experience. As part of that demand, the Coalition is fighting for the elimination of MPD presence in schools and the increase of non-police school-based services. These demands are supported by the Police Reform Commission, who specifically recommends the gradual reduction of School Safety Division staffing, culminating in its dissolution by July 1, 2025,¹¹ and by this Council’s prior legislation.

We urge the Council of the District of Columbia to stay the course, reject the Mayor’s proposal, and continue to require the reduction of police presence in schools planned in the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Support Act.

Sincerely,

ACLU of the District of Columbia

⁸ Robert Bobb, et al., DC Police Reform Commission, *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety: A Report of the DC Police Reform Commission*, 8 (2021), <https://dccouncil.us/police-reform-commission-full-report/>.

⁹ MPD FY2021 Approved Budget for the District of Columbia Government, Schedule 30-PBB, Division 2300, https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/fa_mpd_tables_2021a.pdf.

¹⁰ Qubilah Huddleston, *What’s in the Fiscal Year 2021 Approved Budget for PreK-12 Education?*, DC FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE (Sept. 9, 2020), <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/whats-in-the-fiscal-year-2021-approved-budget-for-prek-12-education/>.

¹¹ Robert Bobb, et al., DC Police Reform Commission, *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety: A Report of the DC Police Reform Commission*, 69 (2021), <https://dccouncil.us/police-reform-commission-full-report/>.

Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

Beloved Community Incubator

The Black Girl TRIBE, Inc.

Blacks in Law Enforcement of America

Black Swan Academy

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Children's Law Center

Civil Rights Corps

Claudia Jones School for Political Education

Collective Action for Safe Spaces

Critical Exposure

DC Action

DC Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression

DC Communist Party USA

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DC Young Communist League USA

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Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative

Georgetown Law Center for Innovations in Community Safety

Grassroots DC

Harriet's Wildest Dreams

Heal Da Homies

Jews United for Justice

Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America

Metro DC DSA Defund MPD Working Group

National Women's Law Center

New Synagogue Project

Nonprofit Professional Employees Union (IFPTE Local 70)

Occupation Free DC (OFDC)

Party for Socialism & Liberation DC (PSL DC)

Peace Fellowship Church

Peace Walks DC

Restaurant Opportunities Center of DC (ROC-DC)

Ronald E. Hampton

The Safe Sisters Circle

School Justice Project

Serve Your City/Ward 6 Mutual Aid

Showing Up for Racial Justice DC (SURJ DC)

Stop Police Terror Project DC

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Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless