

Erin Davies, Executive Director, Juvenile Justice Coalition
Testimony on HB 318
House Finance Committee
April 10, 2018

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 318. The Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC) is an organization that works to ensure that approaches to Ohio youth who are at-risk of involvement or involved in the juvenile court system are research-based and cost-effective. In addition, JJC engages youth leaders to get their perspective on what would be most effective for them and their colleagues.

In February, JJC testified on HB 318 in the House Education Committee. JJC supports the underlying bill, which provides necessary clarification on the role of school resource officers (SROs) in school districts and requires SROs to receive critical training on keeping students out of the school to prison pipeline and youth's unique developmental characteristics. The bill also has a welcome provision that allows for student input on the MOU between the school and the SRO.

However, JJC – along with many other organizations in Ohio and at the national level who have signed the letter attached to my testimony today – is concerned about the funding component before the committee today. Sponsor testimony indicated that the bill would provide \$10 million for “training money for SRO certification, safety devices to secure classroom doors, training equipment money for ALICE or similar training, safety equipment at schools (ballistic shields, first responder bags, safes for storage, hand held magnameters, etc), gun lockers, and all grade level educational resources.” It is our understanding that this language is being modified in Committee today to remove funding for hardware and equipment and instead focus on trainings, including trainings on active shooters and identifying and assisting with students' mental health needs.

We welcome the removal of hardware and equipment from the funding options; these investments would not be an effective investment in school safety and may actually harm safety by increasing tensions in schools. The National Association of School Psychologists has stated that hardening schools can actually increase student fear, which can lead to more violence. However, we remain concerned that the trainings are focused on a law enforcement lens instead of being viewed through a mental health, public health, and trauma-informed lens (i.e. having the grants go through the Attorney General's office and requiring schools to partner with local law enforcement) and prioritize trainings instead of investing in more support for students.

Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Secret Service have studied school shootings and recommended that **the most effective way to prevent school shootings is to put in place systems and supports to help identify youth who are struggling and connect them to the resources they need.** The funding in HB 318 must be focused on the recommendations of research and Ohio students, who are overwhelmingly calling for more holistic, social-emotional, trauma-informed support – including increased access to social workers and mental health professionals – in their schools. Having a strong support staff would help to identify and deescalate situations early and hopefully reduce the need for any law enforcement intervention – SRO or otherwise. These supports would also help to address other safety issues for students, including bullying and violence outside of school. In addition, to adequately address school safety, we believe the grant should be administered through the Ohio Department of Education in partnership with other agencies.

For the sake of Ohio's students, teachers, schools, and communities, we cannot afford to miss an opportunity to invest in smart, research-driven solutions to improve school safety. There is too much at stake.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I look forward to any questions you may have.