

Erin Davies, Executive Director, Juvenile Justice Coalition
Testimony on HB 318
Senate Finance Committee
June 5, 2018

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate 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.

JJC supports the purpose and intent of HB 318, 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 in HB 318. HB 318 would provide \$10 million for training for SRO certification, active shooter trainings, grade level educational resources, and mental health awareness.

We appreciate the funding language was modified from the House version, which included funding for equipment like riot shields; 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.

April 2018

We are writing to respond to a proposal to fund safety measures in Ohio schools, including training for school resource officers (SROs), door security devices, active shooter training, gun lockers, and equipment (i.e. ballistic shields, first responder bags, storage safes, hand held magnameters, etc). School safety is critically important today and unfortunately, this issue hits close to home as Ohio students have been directly impacted by several school shootings.

We firmly believe that it is time for Ohio to invest in strategies that improve school safety that are guided by research. Unfortunately, many investments to date have focused on hardening schools and making them more prison-like, including metal detectors, armed security, and surveillance cameras. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has recognized these measures can be harmful to learning environments, decrease students' sense of safety, and increase student fear – all of which can lead to more violence.ⁱ In addition, there is very little research available on the effectiveness of SROs on reducing criminal activity in schools; many school shootings actually have occurred in schools where an SRO was present at the time of the incident.

Studies on school shooters conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)ⁱⁱ and the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Educationⁱⁱⁱ have recognized that **the most effective way to prevent school shootings is to put in place systems that identify youth who are struggling and may become dangerous.** The authors and other experts found that school shooters faced stressors that “wouldn’t necessarily be problems that an adult would see as especially traumatic, but these young people were unable to handle their emotions, sadness and anger, and they started acting in ways that were, essentially, suicidal.”^{iv} Many of the shooters told others about their plans, feelings of anger, and suicidality, meaning their actions could have been prevented.

Fortunately, these recommendations align with broader research-based recommendations that can address other school safety issues – like bullying. NASP recognizes that schools are more safe when students “(a) come to school feeling safe, welcomed, and respected; (b) have a trusting relationship with at least one adult in the building; (c) understand clear academic and behavioral expectations; and (d) have access to needed mental health supports.” Another report recommends that schools find a balance between “structure (students report that rules are strictly and fairly enforced) and support (students report that adults are supportive, caring, and willing to help).”^v These findings align with requests from Ohio students, who have called for more holistic, social-emotional, trauma-informed support – including increased access to social workers and mental health professionals – in their schools. Having strong support staff would help to identify and deescalate situations early and hopefully reduce the need for any law enforcement intervention – SRO or otherwise. Unfortunately, many Ohio schools do not have adequate support staff, with some larger districts having one counselor shared between several buildings.

We believe that schools must be safe spaces where all children can feel safe, supported and successful. For students who are struggling emotionally and may become a threat, schools must have the resources and processes in place to identify these students and ensure they can get support. **We respectfully request that any funding to increase school safety prioritize research-based social-emotional supports for students – such as increasing the number of counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses or partnerships with community behavioral health organizations – to ensure that students, teachers, and other school personnel are kept safe, healthy, and learning.**

Sincerely,

Organizations:

1. American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio
2. Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education, Case Western Reserve University

3. Campaign for Youth Justice
4. Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
5. Children's Law Center, Inc.
6. Coalition for Juvenile Justice
7. Columbus People's Partnership
8. Disability Rights Ohio; Michael Kirkman, Executive Director
9. Equality Ohio
10. Groundwork Ohio
11. Justice for Children Project, Moritz College of Law
12. Juvenile Justice Coalition (Ohio)
13. Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition
14. National Juvenile Justice Network
15. NROPI, Inc.
16. Ohio PTA
17. Ohio Public Defender
18. Ohio School Social Work Association
19. Ohio Student Association
20. Ohio Transformation Fund
21. Schubert Center for Child Studies, at Case Western Reserve University
22. The Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies
23. The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers
24. The Sentencing Project
25. SparkAction

Individuals:

1. Natasha Baker
2. Samantha L. Cocco, MA
3. Shelley J. Fannin, MSW, LISW
4. Jessica Hardesty
5. paul hill, jr
6. Patrick J Kanary
7. Marquita Mc Allister-Hill
8. Brenda Rinkes, MSW, LISW-S
9. Ron Soeder President Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland
10. Elizabeth Short, PhD, Professor, Psychological Sciences, Case Western Reserve University
11. Erika S. Trapl, PhD

ⁱ National Association of School Psychologists, *Rethinking School Safety Communities and Schools Working Together* (2013).

ⁱⁱ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*, available at <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/safety/fbi-report.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States* (July 2004), available at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>.

^{iv} Maggie Koerth-Baker, *These Researchers Have Been Trying To Stop School Shootings For 20 Years* (March 14, 2018), available at <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/school-shootings-are-still-rare-and-that-makes-them-hard-to-stop/>.

^v University of Virginia Curry School of Education, *Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study Issue 1 Be Strict or Be Supportive* (2007), available at <https://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/vhss-one-pager-issue-1.pdf>.