



Ohio Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
HB 501
December 13, 2022, 10:45am

Opponent Testimony
Written Only

Elaine Schleiffer, co-founder, REACH NEO

To Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Ranking Member Maharath:

My name is Elaine Schleiffer. I am the co-founder of REACH (Responding with Empathy, Access, and Community Healing), Cuyahoga County's grassroots coalition advocating for expanded crisis services in northeast Ohio.

I ask you to vote no on HB 501, to authorize property taxes for school resource officer services, because it will continue a legacy of harm for Ohio's children.

Over the last twenty years, schools nationwide have increased and increased and increased funding for "school resource officers" or "SROs", who are law enforcement officers or deputies placed in schools. In 1975, only 1% of US schools had an SRO; in 2018, 58% of US schools had an SRO, including 72% of all high schools. This has not prevented the ongoing crisis of school violence that has grown exponentially during the same time period.

SROs have exactly the same responses to our school students as law enforcement officers have to the adult population, frequently exerting too much force and regularly targeting historically marginalized populations. In 2017, Black students comprised 15% of the student population in the United States, but accounted for 33% of arrests made in schools.

Research shows that the presence of SROs in schools can actually create higher rates of behavioral incidents, which are moments where stress, fear, and trauma force a student to act out of hand. Students in these situations do not need a criminal/legal response. They need a behavioral health-focused response, one that provides additional resources to them and their family, instead of causing additional trauma to them and their family.

At REACH we advocate for care response for all. Care response is a non-police, clinically-based method that leverages the expertise of paramedics, crisis interventionists, social workers, and peers as first responders. Care response also provides follow-up or wraparound services, connecting the individual in crisis to healthcare and social service supports.

I graduated from Gahanna Lincoln High School, just outside Columbus, seven years after the Columbine high school shooting. I remember a pervasive, daily fear of school shooting incidents. My school invested in more SROs and metal detectors. These measures did not stop bomb threats or gun threats. These measures did not stop fighting, bullying, or harassment. These measures did mean that my classmates faced incredibly harsh punishments for behavioral health problems, problems that needed a health-based, care-based approach in collaboration with family support, rather than a criminal/legal approach that removed that student from their school, their family, and their community.

In Ohio we have failed to protect children from guns, from hunger, from low quality education, from the removal of social safety net programming, and from the opioid crisis. We have failed for more than two decades to provide constitutionally funded public education. The taxes I pay as an employed and homeownership Ohioan SHOULD go to fund public education. That money SHOULD NOT go to fund the school-to-prison pipeline. If we continue failing to resolve the many issues facing our young folks today, Ohio's future is in jeopardy.

Let's not fail our kids again.

I ask you to vote no on HB501, and next session, let's work together with providers of child behavioral and physical health services to find the real solutions needed to help Ohio's kids grow up healthy and strong.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Schleiffer