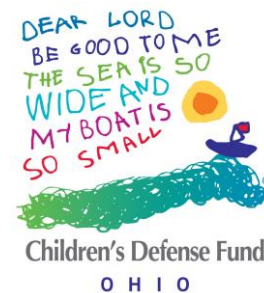


**House Bill 318  
Interested Party Testimony**

**Children's Defense Fund-Ohio  
Ashon McKenzie  
Policy Director  
Senate Finance Committee  
June 4, 2018**



Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Skindell and Senate Finance Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today as an interested party on Senate Bill 318.

My name is Ashon McKenzie; I am the Policy Director for the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. The Children's Defense Fund is a national non-profit advocacy organization with a mission to ensure every child, among other things, *a Safe Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood.

We are pleased to see the bill's qualifications, training requirements, and MOU requirements for school resource officers. These measures will provide clarity, a level of consistency across school buildings and districts, and a means to mitigate an unintended consequence of the presence of police in schools: increased arrests and referrals to juvenile court, particularly for "noncriminal" behavior.

Denver Public Schools is a great example of how this type of training and role clarification for SROs can positively impact school climate and student outcomes. In the aftermath of the Columbine school shooting in 2000, Denver Public Schools increased the presence of SROs. Just four years later, the number of student referrals to the court system increased by 70% with 42% of the referrals for minor issues like offensive language or "disruptive appearance."

Denver took a number of steps including some similar to those in HB 318 including SRO training requirements and limitations on the roles of SROs that kept the resolution of disciplinary problems in the hands of educators. Between the 2003-04 school year and the 2011-12 school year, law enforcement referrals fell from nearly 1,400 per year to 500 with significant decreases in suspensions and expulsions as well.

In addition, we were pleased to see the House of Representatives narrow the funding to SRO training and educational resources. However, there is a long list of possibilities for use of the funding. Our concern is that the mental and behavioral health needs of students will not be prioritized. Threat assessment, mental and behavioral health interventions, and other key resources for children can prevent situations where students may bring harm to themselves or others and, thus, lower the need for emergency interventions. We hope the committee will consider this in moving forward with this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.