

Councilmember Nancy Navarro offers alternative approach to School Resource Officer Program

Alternative approach would create teams that include mental health professionals and counselors

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ROCKVILLE, Md., March 5, 2021—In a memorandum to Councilmember Craig Rice, who chairs the Council’s Education and Culture (EC) Committee and to Councilmember Sidney Katz, who chairs the Council’s Public Safety (PS) Committee, Councilmember Nancy Navarro offered an alternative approach to the County’s School Resource Officer (SRO) Program that would eliminate SROs from schools while ensuring a safe and welcoming school environment for all students and staff. Councilmember Navarro’s proposal comes ahead of a future joint session of the EC and PS committees where they will review and make recommendations on two bills that offer alternatives or enhancements to the current model of SROs in schools.

[Bill 46-20, School Resources Officers – Prohibited](#), which was introduced by lead sponsors Councilmembers Will Jawando and Hans Riemer and cosponsored by Council President Tom Hucker on Nov. 17, 2020. Bill 46-20 would prohibit the Montgomery County Police Department from deploying school resource officers in schools.

[Bill 7-21, Police – School Resource Officer – Building Positive Law Enforcement Relationships Within Schools](#), which was introduced by lead sponsors Councilmembers Craig Rice and Sidney Katz on Feb. 2, 2021, would authorize the Chief of Police to assign a law enforcement officer to work as a school resource officer in a County school upon the request of the superintendent of schools, with a requirement for enhanced training for a school resource officer.

Councilmember Navarro proposed this model after listening to the community, especially the youth, as well as studying both bills. She met with County Executive Marc Elrich and key government officials, including Board of Education President Brenda Wolff, Superintendent of Schools Jack Smith and key school staff as well as student groups and community leaders to review her proposals and incorporate their suggestions into her proposal. She also reviewed related proposals in the Maryland General Assembly, the reports of the Reimagining Safety Task Force workgroup, and the school system’s workgroup. Councilmember Navarro’s proposal also is consistent with the [finding and recommendations in the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact statement on SROs prepared by the County Council’s Office of Legislative Oversight](#).

Councilmember Navarro’s model eliminates the current SRO model, de-emphasizes a law enforcement focus within our schools and instead focuses on the mentoring and mental health needs of students. It includes a public safety cluster model comprised of police officers, mental health professionals, and positive youth development staff. Under the umbrella of racial equity and social justice, the proposed amendment does the following:

- Creates a team that resides outside the schools and moves SROs out of school facilities and into a cluster model.
- Includes positive youth development initiatives and mental health supports in the cluster model with appropriate training for team members.
- Defines and restricts the offenses for which school personnel can call the law enforcement team.
- Enhances school-based services and student-centered supports (pupil personnel workers, counselors, parent community coordinators, Street Outreach Network, Wellness centers, Linkages to Learning, and other student-centered programs). In addition, there should be an awareness program for school personnel to make sure they are informed of the availability of student support services, so they may promote prevention.

“I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues on the Council and the County Executive as well as concerned residents and community leaders for all their hard work in addressing this issue through bill proposals and robust advocacy,” said Councilmember Navarro, who chairs the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee. The events of the past several months offer us a real opportunity to re-imagine and implement a public safety vehicle that de-emphasizes punitive law enforcement within our schools, and instead provides appropriate mental health and mentoring supports for our children.”

The amendments result in a new structure that addresses all the concerns from the stakeholders involved. Councilmember Navarro looks forward to working with her colleagues, County Executive Elrich and MCPS as a team to stand up a policy and an instrument that have the teeth and compassion to support and protect our students.

Councilmember Navarro’s memorandum to the chairs of the Education and Culture Committee and Public Safety Committee can be viewed [here](#) and her memorandum to the County Executive can be viewed [here](#).