

REPORT 04 OF THE COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND PUBLIC HEALTH (A-23)
School Resource Officer Violence De-escalation Training and Certification
(Reference Committee D)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION. Resolution 416-A-22, referred for study by the House of Delegates, asked that our American Medical Association study the efficacy of School Resource Officer violence de-escalation training and certification.

METHODS. English language articles were selected from searches of PubMed and Google Scholar using the search terms “school resource officer”, “school-based law enforcement,” and “school resource officers AND training”. Additional articles were identified by manual review of the reference lists of pertinent publications. Web sites managed by government agencies; applicable organizations were also reviewed for relevant information.

BACKGROUND. A school resource officer (SRO) is a carefully selected, specifically trained, and properly equipped full-time law enforcement officer, trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response, assigned to work in the school using community-oriented policing concepts. Recently, the number of SROs has skyrocketed. Opponents to SROs argue that they damage school climate, criminalize relatively trivial student behavior, and fuel the school-to-prison pipeline. While proponents argue that SROs promote school safety, respond quickly to emergencies, and serve as mentors, role models, and law-related educators for students.

SRO officers may receive training in, among other things, mental health awareness, adolescent development and communication, implicit bias, trauma-informed care, conflict de-escalation, crisis intervention, cultural competence, and school-specific topics. However, within school systems, trainings vary in content and delivery. One intervention, which has limited support in the research literature, is the use of de-escalation techniques and training for educational entities to mitigate the impact of peer aggression and promote the safety of the school environment.

CONCLUSION. This report recognizes that SROs are part of the school staff at large and should not be considered a separate entity from school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, nurses, and schoolteachers. The recommendations support the need for their roles to be defined within the team structure of the school and also supports the use of community-based policing practices to ensure that the community plays a role in prioritizing and addressing public safety. The current evidence is inconclusive on the effectiveness of de-escalation training for SROs. However, research shows that multi-faceted interventions are more likely to be effective, especially in school settings. Further, the recommendations support establishing an agreed-upon operating protocol or memorandum of understanding (MOU) that includes provisions addressing daily interactions between students and school personnel with SROs.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

CSAPH Report 04-A-23

Subject: School Resource Officer Violence De-escalation Training and Certification

Presented by: Noel Deep, MD, Chair

Referred to: Reference Committee D

1 Resolution 416-A-22, referred for study by the House of Delegates, asked that our American
2 Medical Association study the efficacy of School Resource Officer violence de-escalation training
3 and certification.

4
5 **BACKGROUND**

6
7 A school resource officer (SRO) is a carefully selected, specifically trained, and properly equipped
8 full-time law enforcement officer, trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response,
9 assigned to work in the school using community-oriented policing concepts.¹ Recently, the number
10 of SROs has skyrocketed. An estimated 14,000 to 20,000 SROs now work in schools, and the
11 number continues to grow.² Opponents argue that SROs damage school climate, criminalize
12 relatively trivial student behavior, and fuel the school-to-prison pipeline.³ Proponents argue that
13 SROs promote school safety, respond quickly to emergencies, and serve as mentors, role models,
14 and law-related educators for students. One report concluded that for every dollar invested in the
15 program, a minimum of \$11.13 of social and economic value was created.⁴

16
17 SRO officers may receive training in, among other things, mental health awareness, adolescent
18 development and communication, implicit bias, trauma-informed care, conflict de-escalation, crisis
19 intervention, cultural competence, and school-specific topics.⁵ However, within school systems,
20 trainings vary in content and delivery. For example, some training courses include information on
21 evaluation of the de-escalation and crisis response (e.g., support for staff and students after an
22 incident). Further, some training may be a stand-alone curriculum, whereas others may include de-
23 escalation as a topic within other training topics (e.g., classroom management, discipline policy,
24 academic planning).

25
26 One main intervention, which has limited support in the research literature, is the use of de-
27 escalation techniques and trainings for educational entities to mitigate the impact of peer
28 aggression and promote the safety of the school environment.⁶ Across various professional fields,
29 such as public health and education, de-escalation training involves learning strategies for the
30 prevention and the management of aggression and violence. De-escalation may include training in
31 early intervention practices, communication methods (i.e., verbal and non-verbal styles),
32 appropriate responses in potentially violent situations, and the correct use of physical intervention
33 techniques (e.g., restraint techniques, protection). The training is intended to reduce conflict,
34 aggression, and harm. In an educational setting, de-escalation can be defined as a range of
35 interconnected interventions that include verbal and non-verbal communication, self-regulation
36 assessment, and actions taken while maintaining the safety of the those in the school.

1 METHODS

2
3 English language articles were selected from searches of PubMed and Google Scholar using the
4 search terms “school resource officer”, “school-based law enforcement,” and “school resource
5 officers AND training”. Additional articles were identified by manual review of the reference lists
6 of pertinent publications. Websites managed by government agencies; applicable organizations
7 were also reviewed for relevant information.

8
9 DISCUSSION

10
11 *What are SROs?*

12
13 The only definition of SRO in current federal law appears under the authorizing legislation for the
14 Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), which is a component of the U.S.
15 Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing primarily
16 through grant resources. This statute defines an SRO as “a career law enforcement officer, with
17 sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police
18 department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations.”⁷
19 Although specific responsibilities and functions of SROs vary from place to place, the “triad”
20 concept of school-based policing divides SRO responsibilities into three main areas of: teacher,
21 informal counselor, and law enforcement officer.⁸

22
23 *History of SROs*

24
25 Since the 1900s, U.S. public schools have employed a growing number of SROs. In 1975, only 1
26 percent of schools reported having police officers on site, but by 2018, approximately 58 percent of
27 schools had at least one sworn law enforcement official present during the school week.⁹ In
28 response to school shootings in the 1990s, federal and state legislation spurred this rapid
29 proliferation of SROs.

30
31 The first use of SROs in schools is reported to have been in Flint, Michigan, in the early 1950s.¹⁰
32 While police have had a presence in schools since then, it has only been over the past 20 years that
33 the practice of assigning police officers to schools on a full-time basis has become more
34 widespread. The number of SROs expanded significantly beginning in the 1990s due to legislative
35 initiatives in response to concerns over a series of school shootings including the Columbine
36 tragedy. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
37 included provisions that established school safety as a core focus for the U.S. Department of
38 Education (U.S. DOE).¹¹ It also included the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act,
39 which authorized federal support for police in schools via a grant program wherein local education
40 agencies could use funds to hire and train SROs.^{7,12} Between 1994 and 2009, up to 40 percent of
41 federal funding for this act could be used to hire and train school police and support other security
42 measures.¹³ Overall, since 1998, the federal government has invested over \$1 billion to explicitly
43 increase police presence in schools, and over \$14 billion to advance community policing, which
44 can include SROs.^{10,14}

45
46 In recent years, federal funding and support for SROs has increased following tragic school
47 shootings. Despite their concerns about the unintended negative consequences of SROs, the Obama
48 Administration renewed funding to increase the number of SROs across the country after the 2012
49 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.¹⁵ Following the 2018
50 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, the Trump
51 Administration prioritized SRO positions in selecting COPS grants recipients.¹⁶

1 *Federal Policy on SROs*

2
3 Despite their growth and the substantial federal funding, there is very little federal policy explicitly
4 defining the role of SROs. The absence of SROs from federal educational policy is in part due to
5 the Obama administration's concerns over unintended negative consequences of police presence in
6 schools.¹⁷ The vagueness of federal law has led to large variation in the role, expectations, and
7 accountability of police in schools. Moreover, federal-level data collection on SROs is also
8 severely lacking. SROs are not required to register with any national database, police departments
9 are not required to report how many of their officers work as SROs, and school systems are not
10 required to report how many SROs they employ.¹ Since 2013-2014, the U.S. Department of
11 Education has collected survey data every other year that details the number of student referrals
12 and arrests made by school police (including SROs) in public schools, and which students are most
13 affected.¹⁸ The data also include the number of counselors, social workers, school psychologists,
14 and nurses that are in a school compared to the number of SROs.¹⁹ Given this overall lack of
15 descriptive data there is little information on the roles of SROs nationally or how, if at all, SROs
16 are trained. By failing to collect these data, it is difficult to monitor and evaluate the work of SROs
17 and their impact.

18
19 *State Policy on SROs*

20
21 Federal policy and accompanied funding initiatives fueled the growth of SROs programs which are
22 now operated in all 50 states.^{14,19} Yet, the lack of federal law on SROs has led to a patchwork of
23 state policy. Out of all 50 states and Washington D.C., only 26 jurisdictions specifically define
24 SRO in state statutes or regulations.¹⁹ These state-level definitions do not specify the role of SROs
25 in schools. Most states encourage schools or districts to enter into a Memorandum of
26 Understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement if they provide an SRO. For example,
27 Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, and South Carolina require MOUs to outline the role of the
28 SRO.²⁰

29
30 The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) suggests SROs receive at least 40
31 hours of specialized training in school policing prior to being assigned.²⁰ NASRO's Basic SRO
32 training is set up as a 5- day, 40-hour block of instruction and outlines evidence-based best
33 practices for SRO programs.²⁰ This training covers the following topics: constitutional and state
34 law, armed response, crime prevention and mitigation, interview and interrogation techniques,
35 investigations, crime prevention through environmental school design, patrol operations, advocacy
36 within the juvenile justice system, and mandatory reporting.²⁰ Twenty-eight state statutes or
37 regulations include language regarding training requirements for SROs, but these also vary widely
38 and laws in only two states specify a required length of training.²¹ In several states, the training is
39 simply what is required of traditional law enforcement, including firearm or active shooter
40 training.²² Instruction regarding how to effectively interact with youth averages around four to six
41 hours across all states.²² Training in sixteen states includes what is required of traditional law
42 enforcement in addition to school-specific training. Few states explicitly require training in de-
43 escalation or conflict resolution, mental health, youth development, or school climate.²² Only
44 Maryland and Utah explicitly include provisions for training in "implicit bias and disability and
45 diversity awareness with specific attention to racial and ethnic disparities" and "cultural
46 awareness," respectively.²² Therefore, across states there is wide variation in expectations
47 regarding SRO training. Additionally, training is primarily standard police training, with little
48 education on working in school settings and with youth.

49
50 Illinois is an example of this heterogeneity of approach. Illinois state law requires SROs to
51 complete training within one year of assignment.²³ This training must cover juvenile developmental

1 issues, youth mental health, how to prevent child abuse and exploitation, and various educational
2 administrative issues. Illinois does not explicitly require implicit bias, disability training, or de-
3 escalation training.

4 *School District Policy on SROs*

5
6
7 SRO training and duties vary across school districts. In general, SROs must enforce school rules
8 and the law, as well as be visible authority figures in schools. They can also participate in
9 mentorship programs, provide students with training on safety and violence, and promote a positive
10 school environment.²⁴ SROs usually patrol school halls to discourage students from misbehaving,
11 and when a student is caught breaking a school rule or the law, SROs step in to investigate and
12 assist with student discipline. Certain school districts require SROs to follow zero tolerance policies
13 when students are caught with drugs, meaning the SRO has zero discretion in how to respond.
14 Other school districts allow SROs to use discretion to decide a disciplinary course of action.²²

15 16 *Benefits of School Resource Officers*

17
18 School resource officers can provide a variety of benefits not only to schools, but to individual
19 students and local police departments. These benefits include promoting school safety, addressing
20 the root causes of student misbehavior, and decreasing juvenile delinquency petitions where SROs
21 are properly utilized.²⁵ Further, SROs can improve relationships between students and law
22 enforcement, serve as protectors for victimized students, and reduce the burden on local law
23 enforcement. Although there has been limited research, it is hypothesized that SROs can promote
24 safety in schools by deterring criminal activity at schools, specifically more serious crimes
25 including possession of a weapon and assault.²⁶ SROs can also aid in reducing the amount of
26 fighting and bullying on campus through hallway patrols, which can allow SROs to intervene
27 rather quickly when there is a fight.²⁶ Students may be less likely to break the rules or pick a fight
28 when SROs are patrolling school grounds because of the increased probability of being caught.

29
30 Some districts have found that SROs can use their positions to identify the root cause of school
31 misbehavior and help students address it. When SROs are properly utilized, they can potentially
32 help offset the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, SROs in Franklin County, Virginia, often
33 impose alternative methods of punishment to delinquency petitions, such as community service,
34 school service, or mediation.²⁶ Once a student has completed his act of service, they are often
35 encouraged to participate in afterschool extracurricular activities in order to create structure and
36 prevent a second offense. In Franklin County, SROs only send a request for a delinquency petition
37 to the state's attorney after all other avenues have been explored. A study of schools in this county
38 that utilize this approach found a 64 percent decrease in potential delinquency petitions.²⁷

39
40 Research also reveals that SRO programs can improve relationships and build trust between
41 students and law enforcement. A 2016 study that surveyed students from various schools in one
42 southeastern U.S. school district analyzed how students' attitudes towards SROs change with
43 increased interaction.²⁶ Overall, more student-SRO interactions were positively correlated with
44 favorable feelings towards SROs. Other research shows that this improved trust can later help
45 uncover previously unknown issues of abuse and neglect, because victims may feel more
46 comfortable reporting the issue to law enforcement.²⁷ Additionally, SROs can sometimes serve as
47 protectors for students, which can make students feel more comfortable asking for help. This is
48 especially true for students who are victims of various crimes, abuse, and bullying, and who may
49 feel safer attending school knowing an SRO is available to protect them.²⁷ SROs have the unique
50 ability to immediately intervene if a juvenile offender violates any court ordered condition, thereby
51 increasing a victim's sense of safety at school. Finally, SROs can reduce the burden on law

1 enforcement outside of the school. When officers are stationed at schools, the school often no
 2 longer needs to call 911 when a dangerous situation arises because it simply informs the SRO. This
 3 gives the school a quick response time while allowing patrol officers to focus on issues outside of
 4 schools. Overall, some of the benefits of SROs include:

- 5
- 6 • Increasing feelings of safety among students, teachers, and administrators,
- 7 • Deterring aggressive behavior, and empowering staff to maintain order and address
- 8 behavioral issues in a timely fashion,
- 9 • Diminishing classroom time spent on discipline and behavioral disruptions,
- 10 • Improving school safety and reducing school-based crime,
- 11 • Increasing the likelihood that students report witnessing a crime, and help reduce
- 12 community-wide criminality, and
- 13 • Improving relationships between law enforcement and youth.

14 *Impacts on Safety for Marginalized Youth*

15
 16
 17 In the triad model concept advanced by NASRO, in addition to their law enforcement role, SROs
 18 will act as another mentor, educator, or counselor. However, this assumption ignores the fact that
 19 Black youth, Latinx youth, immigrant youth, indigenous youth, and youth living in poverty often
 20 come to school with harmful experiences with police that may perpetuate racial inequalities in
 21 educational, health, and social outcomes.²⁸ By placing SROs in schools, these traumatic issues can
 22 be exacerbated. SROs are more likely to reproduce broader patterns of police targeting and
 23 criminalizing Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and students of color.²⁹

24
 25 Further, SROs are disproportionately placed in schools serving predominantly students of color,
 26 as opposed to schools serving predominantly white populations.³⁰ Among middle and high
 27 schools where more than 75 percent of students were Black, 54.1 percent had at least one SRO or
 28 security officer on campus.^{31,32} By comparison, among middle and high schools where over 75
 29 percent of students were white, only 32 percent had SROs.^{32,33}

30 *SROs Are Associated with Higher Rates of Exclusionary Discipline and Criminalization*

31
 32
 33 Additionally, numerous studies show that the presence of SROs in schools is associated with higher
 34 rates of exclusionary discipline (suspensions and expulsions) which increases the risk of students
 35 being pushed into the “school to prison pipeline.”³³ Students of color across the nation are
 36 disproportionately subject to these exclusionary discipline practices.³⁴ For example, in Connecticut,
 37 suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino male students are two to three times that of
 38 their white counterparts.³⁵ The suspension rate for Black female students is around five times that
 39 of their white counterparts.³⁶

40
 41 Additionally, SROs create the potential to escalate school disciplinary issues, even minor ones, into
 42 arrestable offenses.³⁶ In one survey of SROs, 77 percent reported that they had arrested a student to
 43 calm them down and 55 percent reported arresting students for minor offenses because the teacher
 44 wanted the student to be arrested.³⁷ The majority of school-based arrests are for non-violent
 45 offenses, such as disruptive behavior.³⁹ Further, studies show that the presence of an SRO increases
 46 the number of arrests for “disorderly conduct” – an often ambiguous, and subjective
 47 characterization of behavior.³⁸ Overall, research suggests that SROs’ potential to escalate conflicts
 48 puts students at risk.³⁹ For example, schools that employed police had an arrest rate 3.5 times that
 49 of schools without police.⁴⁰ As with exclusionary discipline, students of color are
 50 disproportionately subject to school arrests.⁴²

1 This pipeline extends further for undocumented students, as contact with SROs can put them at risk
2 of detention and deportation.⁴¹ This risk is heightened in communities where local law enforcement
3 is contracted with Immigration and Customs Enforcement under 287(g) agreements – which allows
4 the Department of Homeland Security to deputize selected state and local law enforcement officers
5 to enforce federal immigration law.⁴² Since 2013, COPS Grants have required recipients to sign a
6 287(g) agreement in order to receive funds. There are several documented cases of SROs putting
7 immigrant students at risk of “school-to-deportation pipelines.”^{43,44}

8 9 *Interference with Education*

10
11 The presence of SROs and exclusionary discipline negatively impacts students’ academic
12 achievement and can accelerate future misbehavior, truancy, and drop-out rates.⁴⁷ Students who
13 have contact with the criminal legal system through arrests and searches experience worse
14 schooling outcomes than those who do not. Arresting students doubles their risk of dropping out.⁴⁵
15 The consequences of a school arrest extend far beyond a youths’ public-school outcomes and
16 include the loss of access to higher education and funding, job eligibility, access to public housing,
17 and increasing both the likelihood and consequence of future law enforcement contact.⁴⁶ Further,
18 trauma and anxiety symptoms can increase with the frequency of police contact, regardless of
19 where that contact occurs. For many students of color, police presence in schools can cause re-
20 traumatization given their negative experiences with law enforcement in their communities.⁵⁰

21
22 The presence of SROs can shift the focus from learning and supporting students to over-
23 disciplining and criminalizing them. Regular police contact, even if this contact is in passing,
24 affects how Black and Latinx youth perceive themselves, their school, and law enforcement.⁴⁷
25 Students of color have reported feeling the police are there to protect the school from them.⁴¹
26 Further, other research shows that the presence of SROs reduced students’ feelings of school
27 connectedness – the belief that adults and peers in the school care about them as humans.^{26,48}
28 School connectedness is an important protective factor – young people who feel connected to their
29 school are less likely to engage in behaviors that are harmful to themselves or others and are more
30 likely to have better academic achievement, attendance, and persistence.⁵⁰ Research also
31 demonstrates that racial and ethnic disparities in discipline are not the consequence of differences
32 in rates or types of misbehavior by students of color and white students but rather racial and
33 cultural biases.⁴⁴

34
35 Lastly, the focus on SROs has also diverted attention and funds from other areas of education that
36 could support students. Between 1999 and 2015, the percentage of students who reported security
37 guards or assigned police officers in their schools increased from 54 percent to 70 percent while the
38 number of school counselors increased by only 5 percent, after adjusting for the growth in student
39 enrollment.⁴² There are also more sworn law enforcement officers than social workers in schools
40 across the U.S., with many states employing two-to-three times as many police officers in than
41 social workers in schools.⁴⁹ Over 4,800 schools reported employing more school police and
42 security than school-based mental health providers.⁵³ Across the country 1.7 million students are in
43 schools with police but no counselors; 3 million are in schools with police but no nurses; 6 million
44 students are in schools with police but no school psychologists; 10 million students are in schools
45 with police but no social workers.⁴² Compared to white students, Latinx, Asian, and Black students
46 are more likely to attend schools where the districts chose SROs over counselors.⁵⁰

47 48 *Impact of SROs on School Shootings*

49

1 There is limited evidence supporting the role of SROs in preventing school shootings.⁵¹ Research
 2 on averted school shootings – incidents planned by students and then prevented – suggests that the
 3 key is having trusted adults whom other students can inform.⁵² One study found that students are
 4 much more likely to report a planned shooting to school staff members; they rarely report this to a
 5 member of law enforcement.⁵⁶ There is also limited evidence on whether SROs can stop an active
 6 shooter or lower deaths or injuries when a school shooting happens. A recent study found that
 7 among all schools that experienced a school shooting between 1999 and 2018, the number of
 8 injuries and deaths was about 2.5 times higher in schools that had an SRO.⁵³ However, in at least
 9 one instance a school shooter deliberately selected an elementary school with no security personnel
 10 instead of the middle school they attended because their middle school had an armed security
 11 officer.⁵⁴ Further, one study found in one-quarter of the studied cases with an active shooter, the
 12 officer or SRO was able to make it to the scene of the attack within one minute. In three of the
 13 attacks (7 percent), it took between one and five minutes for the officer to respond, and for two
 14 attacks (5 percent), it took between five and ten minutes.⁵⁵ In sum, further research is needed to
 15 understand the role SRO's have in deterring school shooters.

16 *Maximizing the Benefits of SRO Programs*

17
 18
 19 Although there has been interest in encouraging the expansion of SRO programs to promote school
 20 safety, some are concerned about the negative effects SROs could have on the school environment.
 21 While research on the efficacy of particular program models or characteristics is limited, the COPS
 22 Office, has identified several elements of a successful SRO program.⁵⁶ First, the COPS guide
 23 suggests that all schools should develop a comprehensive school safety plan based on their school
 24 safety goals and a thorough analysis of the problem(s) the school is facing before determining if it
 25 is necessary to employ an SRO.⁵⁹ In some instances, school safety plans might not require the
 26 deployment of an SRO. However, if after composing a school safety plan the school decides to use
 27 an SRO, there should be clear goals for the program. SROs should engage in problem-solving
 28 policing activities that directly relate to school safety goals and address identified needs, and data
 29 should be collected to determine whether the program is achieving its goals.

30
 31 Second, the COPS guide suggests that schools and the law enforcement agencies that SROs work
 32 for should be aware of any pitfalls before agreeing to establish an SRO program.⁵⁹ There may be
 33 philosophical differences between school administrators and law enforcement agencies about the
 34 role of the SRO. Law enforcement agencies focus on public safety while schools focus on
 35 educating students. Establishing an agreed-upon operating protocol or MOU is considered a critical
 36 element of an effective school-police partnership. The MOU should clearly state the roles and
 37 responsibilities of SROs involved in the program.⁵⁹ However, most schools employing SROs do not
 38 enter into a MOU. Further, MOUs are not publicly available on school websites. This means that
 39 key stakeholders such as students and families lack easy access to information regarding their
 40 rights in relation to interacting with police in schools.⁶⁹

41
 42 Third, the COPS guide suggests that selecting officers who are likely to succeed in a school
 43 environment—such as officers who can effectively work with students, parents, and school
 44 administrators; have an understanding of child development and psychology; and have public
 45 speaking and teaching skills—and properly training those officers are important components of a
 46 successful SRO program.⁵⁹ While it is possible to recruit officers with some of the skills necessary
 47 to be effective SROs, it is also important to provide training so officers can hone skills they already
 48 have or develop new skills that can make them more effective. The Police Foundation, for instance,
 49 recommends that training for SROs focus on the following:

- 50 • child and adolescent development, with an emphasis on the effect of trauma on student
 51 behavior, health, and learning,

- 1 • subconscious (or implicit) bias that can disproportionately affect youth of color and youth
- 2 with disabilities or mental health issues,
- 3 • crisis intervention for youth,
- 4 • alternatives to detention and incarceration, such as peer courts, restorative justice, etc., and
- 5 • legal issues like special protections for students with disabilities.⁵⁷

6
7 Further, one study that surveyed educators, students, officers, and community members suggests
8 that successful SRO programs can do the following:

- 9 • Increase feelings of safety among students, teachers, and administrators,
- 10 • Deter aggressive behavior, and empower staff to maintain order and address behavioral
- 11 issues in a timely fashion,
- 12 • Diminish classroom time spent on discipline and behavioral disruptions,
- 13 • Improve school safety and reduce school-based crime,
- 14 • Increase the likelihood that students report witnessing a crime, and help reduce
- 15 community-wide criminality, and
- 16 • Improve relationships between law enforcement and youth.⁵⁸

17 18 EXISTING AMA POLICY

19
20 AMA policy H-60.902, “School Resource Officer Qualifications and Training” encourages an
21 evaluation of existing national standards to have qualifications through training and certification
22 that includes child psychology and development, restorative justice, conflict resolution, crime
23 awareness, implicit/explicit biases, diversity inclusion, cultural humility, and individual and
24 institutional safety and others deemed necessary for school resource officers. It also encourages the
25 development of policies that foster the best environment for learning through protecting the health
26 and safety of those in school, including students, teachers, staff, and visitors.

27 28 CONCLUSIONS

29
30 Police stationed within K-12 schools, known as SROs, are a common feature of American schools.
31 According to federal data, about half of schools had an SRO on school grounds at least once a
32 week during the 2017-2018 school year.⁵⁹ In the same year, a national survey found that 80 percent
33 of parents supported having police officers in schools, and some states, like Maryland, passed new
34 laws mandating adequate law enforcement at all schools as a result of school shootings.^{60,61}
35 However, since George Floyd’s death in 2020, the U.S. has experienced an intensified debate about
36 the proper role of police in communities, including schools. As a result, school districts, including
37 Chicago and Los Angeles, have significantly cut their budgets for school policing.⁶²

38
39 Opponents of SROs often cite specific incidents of police violence against Black students in
40 schools and link SROs to the broader concept of a school-to-prison pipeline, in which students’
41 early experiences with school discipline and/or police in schools may directly or indirectly
42 influence their lifetime involvement with the criminal justice system.⁶² Critics of SROs fear that
43 having a police officer within a school makes it easier for a student to be formally arrested or
44 referred to juvenile justice for minor acts of misconduct that would otherwise be handled through
45 school discipline.⁶³ This criminalization of school misconduct disproportionately impacts students of
46 color, as evidenced in the existing racial disparities in arrest and incarceration.⁴⁰

47
48 Proponents state that school districts often view SROs as the first line of defense against school
49 shootings and other acts of school violence. SROs also aim to act as a specialized form of
50 community policing, a model of policing designed to assign officers to permanent beats, involve

1 students in decision-making, and problem-solve using non-criminal justice techniques such as
 2 mentoring and informal sanctions.⁶⁴ Consistent with this logic, research has shown that SROs may
 3 improve student attitudes toward the police and improve student and staff perceptions of school
 4 safety.²⁶

5
 6 The current evidence is inconclusive on the effectiveness of de-escalation training for SROs.
 7 However, multi-faceted interventions are more likely to be effective, especially in school settings.
 8 Examples of evidence-based best practices include training on restorative justice, transformative
 9 justice, and trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed schooling.⁶⁵ At the center of each of these
 10 approaches is the development of: healthy relationships; processes that support the healing of harm
 11 and transformation of conflict; and just and equitable learning environments that confront
 12 oppressive structures and systems.⁶⁹

13
 14 Further, establishing an agreed-upon operating protocol or MOU is considered a critical element of
 15 an effective school-police partnership. The MOU should include provisions addressing daily
 16 interactions between students and school personnel with school resource officers.⁶⁶ MOUs are
 17 widely considered important tools to clarify how SROs should operate in an educational
 18 environment.⁶⁷ However, most school districts employing SROs do not have a MOU in place.
 19 Research shows that an upfront MOU agreement can result in fewer court referrals, fewer violent
 20 offenses, and higher graduation rates.⁶⁸

21
 22 It is also important to recognize that SROs are part of the school staff at large and shouldn't be
 23 considered a separate entity from school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, nurses,
 24 and schoolteachers. Their roles should therefore be defined within the team structure of the school.
 25 Finally, community-based policing practices ensure that the community plays a role in prioritizing
 26 and addressing public safety problems.⁶⁹ SRO programs employing these practices can be used to
 27 accomplish two interrelated goals of developing solutions to problems through collaborative
 28 problem solving and improving public trust.

29
 30 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

31
 32 The Council on Science and Public Health recommends that the following be adopted, and the
 33 remainder of the report be filed.

- 34
 35 1. That our AMA amend Policy H-60.902, "School Resource Officer Qualifications and
 36 Training" as follows:
 37 1. Our AMA encourages: (1) an evaluation of existing national standards (and
 38 legislation, if necessary) to have qualifications by virtue of training and
 39 certification that includes child and adolescent psychology and development,
 40 trauma-informed care, restorative justice, peer mediation, conflict resolution, crime
 41 awareness, implicit/explicit biases, how to work with children with disabilities and
 42 special needs, diversity inclusion, cultural ~~humility~~ competence of the distinct
 43 cultural groups represented at schools, de-escalation training, and individual and
 44 institutional safety and others deemed necessary for school resource officers; and
 45 (2) the development of policies that foster the best environment for learning
 46 through protecting the health and safety of those in school, including students,
 47 teachers, staff and visitors. (Modify HOD Policy)
 48
 49 2. That our AMA encourage: (1) school districts initiating SROs develop and those with
 50 existing SROs maintain an up-to-date Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly
 51 outlines processes for officer selection and assessment, defines roles and responsibilities of

- 1 SROs and their scope relative to school personnel, identifies data to be collected, and
2 establishes a mechanism for program evaluation and oversight; (2) SROs to have access to
3 local public health resources; (3) schools with SRO programs to collect and report data to
4 help evaluate the impact of SROs in schools; and (4) federal and state grant programs
5 which provide funding for SRO programs, require collection and reporting of data to
6 inform policymaking on these programs. (New HOD Policy)
7
- 8 3. That our AMA acknowledges: (1) SROs are part of the school staff at large and their
9 responsibilities should be defined within the team; and (2) community-based policing
10 practices are essential for a successful SRO program. (New HOD Policy)

Fiscal Note: less than \$1,000

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