

Testimony in opposition to H8310

The mass shooting in Uvalde makes clear that the function of school police is NOT safety. Police are unable to prevent harm nor do they increase the overall safety of a school. Research/studies on police in schools confirm that police do not create safety, they create harm.

We can't let history repeat itself. After each school mass shooting, the response to valid safety concerns is to add police, security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to school. It's a reactive approach that continues to fail our young people and families

The best defense against a school shooting has always been a positive school climate and engaged learning community. This includes dismantling school policing, investing in comprehensive mental and emotional health services and support staff, and an expansion of restorative justice practices. It also includes gun control that does not result in increased policing of Black and Brown people or people with disabilities. Strong communities and positive environments are our best defense against the manifestation of isolation, white supremacy and the pro-gun culture of America.

Police in schools equal violence. [Police assaults against students](#) escalated to an alarming rate when schools reopened last fall following COVID-19 closures.

- Pre-COVID, average of about one assault per week during the school year—physical and sexual violence, and even murder, of students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students
- As students returned to school this fall 2021, we saw:
 - one assault in August,
 - one assault in September,
 - three assaults in October,
 - NINE assaults in November (a short month with Thanksgiving)
 - EIGHT assaults in December (a short month with holidays)
- A number of schools went back to remote as the Omicron variant surged but continued to see police violence against students this winter/spring.

Not only do police not keep young people safe, they bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, and prevent them from learning. In a [survey](#) of young people with police at their schools,

- one in five respondents reported police verbally harass or make fun of students
- half of respondents reported police taking students out of the classroom
- In three out of four jurisdictions surveyed, young people experienced or knew someone who experienced sexual harassment at the hands of police at school.

Police are unable to prevent harm nor do they increase the overall safety of a school. Research/studies on police in schools confirm that police do not create safety, they create harm.

- A [Brown University study](#) released in October 2021 found that school police do not prevent school shootings, nor gun-related incidents. Further, the researchers found that the presence of SROs harms school environments and increases the number of arrests and police referrals of students, as well as the use of suspensions and expulsions. The presence of SROs also increases absenteeism among students with disabilities.
- Researchers at [Hamline University](#) recently found that there is no association between the presence of an SRO and the deterrence of violence. In fact, they found a *higher* mortality rate when an armed officer is present during a school mass shooting.
 - The research looked at 133 shootings where one or more people were intentionally shot in a school building or where someone came to school armed with the intent of firing indiscriminately. The study found that there were three times as many people killed when there was an officer on the scene who was armed.
- Another study found “none of the currently employed school firearm violence prevention methods have empirical evidence to show that they actually diminish firearm violence in schools.” <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/vio.2018.0044>

Students of color disproportionately experience policing and its harms.

- [Studies](#) show that students at majority Black and Brown schools are more likely to have metal detectors and other school hardening and surveillance tech at their schools.
- Black girls are *3.7 times more likely* than white girls to be arrested and referred to law enforcement. Black boys are more than two times more likely to be arrested or referred to law enforcement than white boys.
- No evidence that there is actually disproportionality in student “misbehavior.”

There is a lack of legal accountability for police in schools to actually keep students safe, showing that is not their true function.

- During the shooting at Parkland, Florida, the SRO stood outside while the mass shooting occurred indoors. A federal judge [later ruled](#) that the officer did not have a legal obligation to protect students from the shooter.
- A state commission found that officers there failed to follow protocols that could have led to a faster response.

Despite commitments to “racial justice” by removing police from schools from school districts and elected officials – which show acknowledgement that policing is a racist institution – districts are not following through and policing in schools continues to increase.

- As (reported uses of) exclusionary discipline practices have gone down over time, arrests and referrals to law enforcement have actually increased (2015-16 to 2017-18 [US Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection](#), most recent data).

Uvalde makes clear that the function of school police is NOT safety, but rather to control Black and brown students and families. (see also the history timeline:

<https://policefreeschools.org/timeline/>)

- In decades before Columbine shooting, police were in schools to control and criminalize Black and brown young people. Responded to students organizing, protesting, students of color integrating white schools
- This was true in Uvalde, too. As students in Uvalde protested the conditions of their schools as part of the Chicano movement in the 60s and 70s, the Texas Rangers were called to Uvalde during walkout. Students remember the Rangers stood on rooftops with loaded rifles.
- After the Columbine shooting in 1999, Congress began providing federal dollars for school police, and other hardening and surveillance measures increased across the country. Nationally, 19 percent of elementary school students, 45 percent of middle schoolers and 67 percent of high school students attend a school with a campus police officer, according to [a 2018 report from the Urban Institute](#).
- In Texas, state legislators expanded the state's school-to-prison pipeline and the practice of school policing in 1995 by adopting Chapter 37 of the Education Code. School finance legislation passed in 1993 required this 1995 overhaul of the Education Code. The majority of the 1995 plan focused on deregulating local school districts' management and curriculum but required stricter school discipline statewide.[1] The legislation codified zero-tolerance policies, classified age-appropriate forms of student behavior as Class C misdemeanors, and codified parameters for school districts to employ SROs, commission their own school police departments or combine these practices for even more extensive school policing.[2]
 - Today the state has more school police departments than any other (over 200) that police over 2.75 million students—in a state with a majority Latinx students served by public schools.
- After Parkland, Florida, the state passed a law requiring school police or armed staff at every school. A Santa Fe Texas school shooting just a few months later in that same year left 10 dead. The state responded by expanding social media surveillance, expanding training for law enforcement, and increasing school police. Across the state, \$100 million was budgeted for security upgrades such as metal detectors, security systems, two-way radios and bullet-resistant glass.

Uvalde had all of the school policing infrastructure that districts claim keep students safe.

- Uvalde invested significantly in school policing infrastructure. The district, with ~4500 students – 90% Latinx – had its own school district police department (and the city, with about 16,000 residents, spends 40% of its budget on policing).
- The district police department conducted active shooter training, including as recently as two months ago. Its active shooter guidance stated that an arriving officer's "first priority is to move in and confront the attacker," even if that officer has to act alone.
- The district spent \$435,270 this year on security and monitoring services – more than doubling in past 4 years. It received at least another \$69,000 from the state to bolster security in 2020. The district had:
 - Threat assessment teams at each school and a system for anonymous bullying reporting

- Social media monitoring through the company Social Sentinel
- Coordination with other law enforcement agencies:
 - Support from border patrol and ICE; border patrol ultimately killed the gunman
 - In 2020, the city of Uvalde's police SWAT team toured school campuses to interact with students and familiarize themselves in case of an emergency
- The contradicting versions of events have been uncovered with high publicity – but we see police present their narratives about students on whom they inflict violence every day that go unquestioned. Uvalde presents an opportunity to understand we cannot trust law enforcement, and we must trust and respond to students who have been clearly laying out the harms of policing for years.

We can't let history repeat itself. After each school mass shooting, the response to valid safety concerns is to add police, security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to school.

- It's a reactive approach that continues to fail our students and families. Police in schools didn't prevent the shootings in Newton, Mass, Parkland, FI, or countless others.
- Instead we see an uptick in students arrested for mostly minor offenses and increased referrals to law enforcement.
- We also see an increase in policing budgets rather than investing in school support systems.
- We need to invest in real solutions that have long-term effects this includes:
 - Dismantle school policing
 - Comprehensive mental and emotional health services
 - More guidance counselors and social workers
 - Expansion of restorative justice practices
 - Protection for students and families from ICE arrests around schools
 - Gun Control that does not result in increased policing of Black and Brown people or people with disabilities.

The best defense against a school shooting has always been a positive school climate and engaged learning community.

- In these spaces, youth are not only less likely to experience the isolation and mental stresses that contribute to these shooting, but their peers are also more likely to acknowledge the problem and seek help for their classmate.
- Strong communities and positive environments are our best defense against the manifestation of isolation, white supremacy and the pro-gun culture of America.

Frequently Asked Questions

**We need tangible solutions to address mass shootings today, not in some far-off future.
How can we keep students safe in schools without police?**

As we saw in Uvalde, police in schools do nothing to deter mass shootings. In fact, they are associated with a higher mortality rate when present during a school mass shooting. In order to keep young people safe, we have to get to the root of the issue and address access to weapons and a culture that turns a blind eye to white supremacy and toxic masculinity. In the meantime, young people deserve to feel safe in their places of learning and not live in fear of police, policing, or the threat of the next mass shooting.

Is hardening schools a viable solution? Should we be looking at locked doors, surveillance, metal detectors, and other measures like those?

Schools are places of learning, where childhood happens. They should not be built like fortresses or prisons. After each school mass shooting, the response to valid safety concerns is to add police, security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to school.

It's a reactive approach that continues to fail our students and families. Police in schools didn't prevent the shootings in Newton, Mass, Parkland, FI, or countless others. Children need to feel safe and nurtured in schools, and that is only possible with long-term solutions that don't involve policing or hardening measures in schools.

Not all parents, even from communities of color, agree with removing police from schools. What do you have to say to them?

We all want to keep students safe. The best defense against violence in schools has always been a positive school climate and engaged learning community.

Police are unable to prevent harm nor do they increase the overall safety of a school. Instead they bully, abuse, and traumatize young people, and prevent them from learning. Strong communities and positive environments are our best defense against the manifestation of isolation, white supremacy and the pro-gun culture of America.

What is your position on guns and their role in school shootings?

Young people deserve a positive school climate and engaged learning community. We need to invest in real solutions that have long-term effects. This includes gun control that does not result in increased policing of Black and Brown people or people with disabilities. It also includes dismantling school policing, investing in comprehensive mental and emotional health services and support staff, and an expansion of restorative justice practices.

Other Resources

- **Police in Schools are not the Answer to School Shootings:** <https://advancementproject.org/resources/police-schools-not-answer-school-shootings>
- **We Came to Learn Report & Action Kit:** <https://policefreeschools.org/resources/>