



June 11, 2020

Dear XXX,

William E. Raney,
President

Brendan Donelon

Josephine Goode
Evans

Rob King

Diane Levine

Robert W. Waugh

Now more than ever it is essential that we remove School Resource Officers (SROs) from Missouri's schools. SROs do not make all students feel safe. The presence of SROs constitutes a continuous threat to Black students and a direct feeder for the School to Prison Pipeline. We have seen dozens of videos of SROs violently handling Black students like Kalyb Primm in Kansas City. Primm was bullied at school and reacted like any seven year old, with tears and cries. He was handcuffed by an SRO and left traumatized. His case is one amongst many. It is far past time to reimagine what we mean when we say schools are safe places.

Luz María Henríquez
Executive Director

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At this moment when we are rethinking budgets and deeply questioning the role police should play in our society, we must understand that SROs are not an appropriate use of funding. The presence of SROs puts specific students at risk for falling into the School to Prison Pipeline and does not improve educational outcomes or public safety. When students return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, many will struggle to cope with the social upheaval and behaviors may arise as a result of new traumas that must be met with compassion and increased resources not police. Now is the time to invest in counselors, social workers, and other wraparound services.

In Missouri schools there are 328 students for every 1 counselor, 488 students to every 1 nurse, 2250 students to every 1 social worker, and 4867 students to every 1 psychologist. In many parts of Missouri more than a quarter of the students attend school districts that have invested money in one or more SROs but not a single counselor. This pattern of investment shows a clear interest in policing our youth rather than helping them to flourish. There is no evidence that zero tolerance policies and increased police presence actually make our schools safer. Investing in community health and wellness is what the evidence shows will actually keep our students, teachers, and schools safe.

It is also essential to consider how the presence of SROs affects Black students. Students of color must be provided with an equal education. This obligation cannot be met with police officers in the classroom. SROs serve as a constant reminder to Black students of the violence police represent in their communities. We have seen too many incidents in just the last month of police officers killing Black people who are perceived to be a threat. How can a Black student engage at school when their childlike behavior could be perceived as criminal or threatening? We have seen it time and time again.

With Black students 4.5 times more likely to be removed from the classroom for violations like disruptive behavior and four times more likely than their White peers to be arrested while at school. Students should be focused on their education and we should provide an atmosphere where they can learn.

The research is clear, the presence of SROs in schools is not an indicator of violence. In reality, the correlation we see isn't behavior at all, it's race. More SROs at a school correlates directly with the enrollment of Black and Brown students. Across the country, Black and brown kids are more likely to be charged with things like "disorderly conduct" when a police officer is stationed at their school. Students with disabilities are also disparately subjected to police interventions at school. We must protect all Missouri's students and give them the opportunity to thrive at school. SROs do not fit this goal, and we must act now to shift our priorities away from policing and toward protecting our youth.

In this move, Missouri would not be alone. We would be joining communities like Denver, Seattle, Oakland, New York City, St. Paul, Boston, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Phoenix in rethinking their SRO programs. We must act now to invest in the resources that students truly need. There is no time to waste.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Luz María Henríquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Luz" being the most prominent.

Luz María Henríquez
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri