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Governor Andy Beshear
700 Capital Avenue
Suite 100
Frankfort, KY 40601

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Governor Beshear:

I am writing to you regarding **House Bill 63**, an act that would require the placement of at least one police officer on every single school campus in Kentucky, except in instances where the schools do not have available funding.

When police enter schools, they do what they are trained to do: detain, handcuff, and arrest. Children are much more likely to be subjected to school-based arrests – **the majority of which are for nonviolent offenses, such as disruptive behavior** – than they were a generation ago. This is part of a nationwide trend driven by the presence of police in schools.

Putting police in schools disproportionately pushes children of color and children with disabilities into the criminal legal system, and Kentucky-specific data prove it:

- Black students are 5.1 times more likely to be arrested than all other students
- Black girls are roughly 7 times more likely to be arrested than white girls
- Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be arrested than all other students combined and roughly three times more likely than white students without disabilities
- 11% of Kentucky students are Black yet they make up 37% of student arrests
- 14% of Kentucky students are considered students with disabilities, yet they make up 29% of student arrests¹

Additionally, police disrupt learning and counter the very mission of what a school is meant to be. Police officers are part of the criminal legal system, not our school systems. School law enforcement referrals and arrests not only push children into the criminal legal system, but also disrupt learning environments for



all students. Schools are meant to be educational and supportive environments where children can learn, grow, and thrive. Although the intent of placing police officers may be to increase school safety, the data clearly show this only increases the risk of students being harmed or placed in the criminal legal system.

Moreover, most arrests are for typical misbehavior that is part of growing up for most, if not all, children. All children misbehave and make mistakes. When they do, they need a supportive environment that will allow them to right their wrongs and learn from their mistakes. Instead, national data show police arrest children for so-called “serious offenses,” 96% of which do not involve a weapon or sexual violence. This is more evidence that children are arrested for misbehavior that could be addressed with school counselors and therapists – not the criminal legal system.

Instead of forcing police into schools, lawmakers could better serve Kentucky students by increasing the resources that are proven to positively impact children’s mental health and overall well-being, which in turn supports better behavior and educational outcomes. Resources like school-based counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, and evidence-based social-emotional programming is proven to be effective in addressing issues of mental health, safety, school violence, and overall academic success for youth.²

House Bill 63 may be well-intentioned, but the evidence shows this strategy for addressing school-based issues will have devastating consequences on Kentucky students. I respectfully urge you to veto House Bill 63 and guide Kentucky to a safer, more supportive environment for our children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kia Nishida

1. Whitaker, A., Torres-Guillen, S., Morton, M., Jordan, H., Coyle, S., Mann, A., & Sun, W. L. Cops and no counselors: How the lack of school mental health staff is harming students. American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>

2. Rossen, E. & Cowan, K.C. (2014). Improving mental health in schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 96 (4), 8-13.