

**Testimony of Qubilah Huddleston, Education Policy Analyst
at the Hearing on the
Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2020
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
October 15, 2020**

Chairperson Allen and other members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Qubilah Huddleston and I am a Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a nonprofit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's racial and economic inequities through independent research and policy recommendations.

I'm here today to highlight how the police free schools movement directly relates to the DC Council's efforts to reform or reimagine policing. **I'm recommending that this committee amend the Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2020 to include the elimination of the School Safety Division within the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and realign the division's funds to increase mental health and other school-based alternatives that support positive student behavior and healthy school climates.**

First, however, I would like to thank Chairperson Allen for introducing the Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2020 as an effort to answer community advocates' calls to make DC residents safer and the District more just. It is an important first step to curtailing the disproportionate harm that current policing policies and practices have on Black residents. Still, the DC Council should pass future legislation and budgets that dismantle long-standing systems of oppression and promote reparative justice and healing.

Police Presence in Schools Causes More Harm Than Good

Black residents and communities deserve to feel safe and respected, not overpoliced—this includes Black children who make up two-thirds of the public school population in DC. Although school resource officers (SROs) have been lauded as keeping students and schools safe, the presence of police in schools has resulted in Black students and students with disabilities being disproportionately harmed by their presence. In DC, 92 percent of school-based arrests in the 2018-19 school year were Black students; 31 percent were students with disabilities.¹

Existing national research on the effectiveness of school police has often relied solely on self-reported measures from students, educators, and officers rather than rigorous research methods.² DC policymakers recently passed a budget that includes \$14 million to fund 127 SROs across the city—a 22 percent increase over the fiscal year 2020 budget (adjusted for inflation). It is concerning that policymakers continue to fund a “student safety” model that is generally supported by weak or conflicting evidence while underfunding evidence-based and community-preferred alternatives such as school social workers and violence interrupters.

Racist History of Policing Should Compel Policymakers to Reconsider Approach to Student Safety

If this committee and the council as a whole are serious about anti-racist policymaking and closing the racial gap in student learning outcomes, you all must seriously acknowledge the racist roots of policing and the fact that Black people in this country have a rightfully fraught relationship with the police. The very first public police forces in this country were slave patrols—organizations of white men paid to capture Black people who fled

from enslavement and who used terror and corporal punishment to deter revolt and maintain order and discipline on plantations. What kind of message is the District sending to Black children in the 21st century when policymakers and education officials prioritize policing and policing infrastructure in schools while failing to adequately or equitably fund resources that actually make students feel safe and help them thrive, such as transformative justice programs and mental health supports?

The Black Burden of the Health Pandemic and Protests Against Police Violence Require Radical Changes to Student Safety—Starting with Eliminating the School Safety Division

The unequal burden of coronavirus on Black residents coupled with life-saving disruptions to students’ academic and social lives means that Black children are at an even higher risk of exposure to stress and traumatic experiences compared to their non-Black peers. Further, Black children are facing greater race-based trauma as videos of Black people being murdered by police officers and the violent reactions from police to protests against this violence have become a part of our regular news cycle and social media feeds.

And, despite the long-held, anti-Black beliefs that in order for Black children to learn and “act right” they must be surveilled, policed, and punished—research and Black folks’ lived experiences shows us that what is truly needed is empathy and resources that help not harm; and root causes addressed, rather than symptoms. Eliminating the School Safety Division in favor of a community-driven process to reallocate funding and staffing away from school policing is a great and necessary place for policymakers to begin adequately promoting Black students’ safety and healing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “2019 DC School Report Card,” 2019.

² Barbara Raymond, “[Assigning Police Officers to Schools](#),” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Response Guides Series No. 10*, April 2010.