

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Jennifer Solpietro, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Howard Progressive Project.

Tonight, I'd like to address the issue of School Resource Officers (SROs) and their impact on Black students.

Black Americans have a unique relationship with and perception of law enforcement in the United States, borne out of four hundred years of lived experiences. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in 1865, but it made an exception for those convicted of crimes, leaving the door open for white Americans to use law enforcement and the justice system to maintain a racial hierarchy. As a result, to this day, Black Americans are disproportionately targeted for harassment, wrongful arrests, excessive force, brutality, and murder at the hands of law enforcement officers.

It is within this context that we must acknowledge the negative effects of law enforcement officers on Black students in schools. Civil rights data show that the disparate impact of law enforcement on the Black community is as severe inside schools as it is anywhere else. The most recent HCPSS data shows Black students making up less than 24% of the student population, but making up well more than half of students receiving referrals for law enforcement and nearly three quarters of students arrested.

But that's just data. The human experience that goes with it is far more consequential, as Black students report being targeted and surveilled, of feeling anxious and fearful in their own schools, because of the presence of law enforcement officers. The lifelong consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline are significant and devastating. While others may feel a sense of safety in having a police presence at school, it comes at a steep cost to Black students in a way no data can quantify.

Black students are sounding the alarm and advocating for police-free schools. It is long past time to center Black voices, to receive their influence, to follow their lead.

This is how we demonstrate that Black Lives Matter.

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