



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Pennsylvania Senate

FROM: Elizabeth Randol, Legislative Director, ACLU of Pennsylvania

DATE: December 13, 2023

RE: OPPOSITION TO SB 907 P.N. 1291 (REGAN)

Bill summary: [SB 907](#) (PN 1291) would amend the [Public School Code](#) to require that every school entity in Pennsylvania, beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, have at least one full-time armed school security person on duty during the school day at each school building. School entities may also decide to have armed school security on duty during extracurricular activities. SB 907 would permit schools to use money allocated to the School Safety and Security Fund to pay for armed school security personnel. The bill defines “school entity” as a school district, intermediate unit, area career and technical school, charter school or private residential rehabilitative institution.

On behalf of over 100,000 members and supporters of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, I respectfully urge you to oppose Senate Bill 907.

SB 907 would exacerbate Pennsylvania’s high student arrest rates, especially for students of color and students with disabilities.

In Pennsylvania, school districts with larger enrollments of students of color or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds typically have more police officers on duty and receive more funding for law enforcement. And over the past ten years, Pennsylvania schools have relied more on policing. Yet [studies show](#) that as schools increasingly rely on police for security, administrators refer more students to law enforcement for nonviolent infractions.¹

In fact, the presence of armed officers [intensifies](#) the use of suspension, expulsion, police referral, and arrest of students.² And when compared to similar schools, schools with a police presence have [greater rates](#) of exclusionary discipline, such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.³ [Data has repeatedly](#) demonstrated that such increases in disciplinary and police actions are consistently largest for students of color and students with disabilities.⁴ Nationwide, Black students and students with disabilities are referred to law enforcement at nearly twice their share of the overall student population.⁵

Furthermore, despite guidance from the [National Association of School Resource Officers \(NASRO\)](#) telling officers **not** to reprimand students, 63% of secondary school administrators report that police **do participate in discipline**. The mere presence of police can subtly [alter school policies and procedures](#), increasing the likelihood of exclusionary discipline even in situations where they are not actively involved in it.⁶

¹ Chongmin Na & Denise C. Gottfredson (2013) [Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors](#), *Justice Quarterly*, 30:4, 619-650.

² Sorensen, Lucy C., Montserrat Avila Acosta, John Engberg, and Shawn D. Bushway. (2023). [The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing Across the U.S.](#) (EdWorkingPaper: 21-476).

³ Fisher, B.W., Hennessy, E.A. [School Resource Officers and Exclusionary Discipline in U.S. High Schools: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis](#). *Adolescent Res Rev* 1, 217–233 (2016).

⁴ American Civil Liberties Union, [Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students](#), 2019.

⁵ Mitchell, Corey. [What you need to know about school policing](#). The Center for Public Integrity, September 8, 2021.

⁶ Curran F. C., Fisher B. W., Viano S. L., Kupchik A. (2020). [Understanding school safety and the use of school resource officers in understudied settings](#). *US Department of Justice*.

SB 907 would not deter school shootings or reduce casualties by requiring the presence of a school police officer; in fact, it may increase those risks.

SB 907 ignores clear and widespread evidence, and multiple real world examples, that having armed guards in schools does not reduce fatalities during the instance of a school shooting.⁷ In fact, the presence of armed guards in schools can actually increase the number of fatalities, since there is always room for error whenever firearms are present, even when it comes to highly trained officers.⁸

More alarmingly, research suggests that many mass shooters are actively suicidal and intend to die in the act, so the presence of an armed officer may function as an **added incentive** to carry out the act, rather than serving as an effective deterrent.⁹

SB 907 risks creating an atmosphere of fear and surveillance, making students and teachers feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

Researchers examining student conduct have discovered that inclusive school cultures reduce the likelihood of misbehavior, including criminal activity. These are educational institutions where pupils have a sense of belonging, respect, value, and community. Even with the best of intentions, officers may weaken trust and create an environment that is less welcoming in schools, which compromises the efficacy of behavior control.

Students don't necessarily feel comforted by police or other armed security. Instead, some have said they feel surveilled—particularly Black and brown children. There is a growing body of research revealing that regular interactions with police officers, both in and out of school, have a harmful effect on students' academic performance. This is particularly true for Black students, who are more likely to exhibit signs of trauma as a result of these interactions. A recent study found that “exposure to police violence leads to persistent decreases in grades, increased incidence of emotional disturbance and lower rates of high school completion and college enrollment for Black and Latino students.”¹⁰ Another study noted that being stopped at school by police officers was a “potent” predictor of heightened emotional distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms in youth. It also noted that the presence of guards and metal detectors in schools significantly increased students' perceptions of fear.¹¹ And yet another found that there is a greater sense of risk and increased anxiety in students when an officer is present because they are concerned that something will happen.¹²

While the intent of the prime sponsor to keep students safe is a laudable goal, SB 907 nevertheless ignores all available evidence that armed officers in schools cause more harm to students, and do little, if anything, to keep them safe. SB 907 will create a more intimidating and militarized learning environment for students, exacerbate Pennsylvania's high student arrest rates—especially for students of color and students with disabilities—while likely increasing the risk of injury and death during a school shooting.

For these reasons, we urge you to oppose Senate Bill 907.

⁷ Esposito, Laura and Alex Yablon. [Do Armed Guards Prevent School Shootings?](#) The Trace, August 14, 2024.

⁸ Peterson J, Densley J, Erickson G. [Presence of Armed School Officials and Fatal and Nonfatal Gunshot Injuries During Mass School Shootings, United States, 1980-2019](#). *JAMA Network Open*. 2021;4(2):e2037394.

⁹ Peterson J, Densley J. [The Violence Project database of mass shootings in the United States: Key Findings](#).

¹⁰ Ang, D. [The Effects of Police Violence on Inner-City Students](#). *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 136, 1, 115–168 (2021).

¹¹ Bachman, R. et al. [Predicting Perceptions of Fear at School and Going to and From School for African American and White Students: The Effects of School Security Measures](#). *Youth and Society*, 43(2): 705–726 (2011).

¹² Curran, F. C., Viano, S., Kupchik, A., & Fisher, B. W. (2021). [Do Interactions With School Resource Officers Predict Students' Likelihood of Being Disciplined and Feelings of Safety? Mixed-Methods Evidence From Two School Districts](#). *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(2), 200-232.