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\*All quotes attributable to Defund WPD\*

### **Defund WPD Statement On Today's "Cops out of Schools - Yes!" Protest**

Today from 12:00 to 1:30 Defund WPD, along with the Massachusetts Human Rights Commission, Racism Free WPS and the Progressive Labor Party, will hold a protest in Worcester's Lincoln Square demanding the removal of School Resource Officers (police officers assigned to school buildings) from the Worcester Public Schools.

School Resource Officers (SROs) are one of many systemic injustices that Black and Brown children face daily as they navigate their way through the educational system. The presence of armed law enforcement in schools creates unsafe environments for Black, brown, queer and trans, and disabled students -- demographics most likely to be policed, suspended, arrested, and harmed for minor infractions such as cell phone use or backtalk. The WPS' Strategic Plan admits to "disproportionate application of disciplinary measures to students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds" and yet they continue to increase funding for SROs despite a Justice Policy Institute finding that schools with SROs have five times many arrests for vague offenses like "disorderly conduct" than schools without them.<sup>1</sup> SROs are the gatekeepers at the entrance to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Not only is the SRO program a dangerous policy, it is also an expensive one: Worcester taxpayers will spend \$1 million on SROs this year. The funding comes from the school-side "Supplemental Salaries Program" which provides \$120,000 as well as \$861,309 from the city's police budget, a \$16,000 increase from last year.<sup>2</sup>

Despite claims from law enforcement, SROs do not make our schools safer. School shootings have become increasingly commonplace, yet SROs actions have fallen very short of heroic. Former Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School SRO Scot Peterson hid for 45 minutes while a gunman killed 17 students. His defense was that, as a law enforcement officer and not a caregiver, stopping the shooting was outside his official capacity.<sup>3</sup> A federal judge found that law enforcement and school officials had no legal duty to protect students during the shooting since they were not "in custody."<sup>4</sup> If SROs do not prevent school shootings then what purpose do they serve?

The presence of SROs "contributes to feelings of alienation and disengagement, distrust of authority and lower educational outcomes."<sup>5</sup> At City Council and School Committee meetings, teachers, students, and alumni have demanded that this \$1 million be reallocated to resolve other dire needs within our schools. It is time for Worcester's politicians to listen to our demands.

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<sup>1</sup> Justice Policy Institute. "The Presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in America's Schools." Justicepolicy.org. 9 July, 2020, [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/School\\_Resource\\_Officers\\_2020.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/School_Resource_Officers_2020.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Novick, Tracy. "The Line for Policing in the Worcester Public Schools Budget." *Whos of Who-Cester*, Blogger, 31 May 2020, [who-cesterp.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-line-for-policing-in-worcester.html?fbclid=IwAR1WfCuWVrrgOwmFNaWTqHw3so4yUq\\_TKwMCmSukDNmQYFOBpWG-nmTQHwQ](http://who-cesterp.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-line-for-policing-in-worcester.html?fbclid=IwAR1WfCuWVrrgOwmFNaWTqHw3so4yUq_TKwMCmSukDNmQYFOBpWG-nmTQHwQ).

<sup>3</sup> Chavez, Nicole. "This Is What Scot Peterson Did during the Parkland School Shooting." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 5 June 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/06/04/us/parkland-scot-peterson-actions/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/06/04/us/parkland-scot-peterson-actions/index.html).

<sup>4</sup> Bacon, John. "Police, Schools Had No Duty to Protect Parkland School Shooting Victims, Judge Rules." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 20 Dec. 2018, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/12/19/parkland-shooting-judge-school-cops-no-duty-protect-kids/2360683002](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/12/19/parkland-shooting-judge-school-cops-no-duty-protect-kids/2360683002).

<sup>5</sup> Lindberg, Maya. "False Sense of Security." *Teaching Tolerance*, 2015, pp. 22–25.