

NATIONAL
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NETWORK

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USE PROVEN APPROACHES – NOT COPS – TO KEEP SCHOOLS SAFE

*School Resource Officers Not the Answer,
Says National Organization of Juvenile Justice Advocates*

(Washington, DC) The National Juvenile Justice Network applauds President Obama for his response to the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut and his genuine interest in addressing gun violence. Nevertheless, there is one piece of his plan that the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) feels could have adverse effects on the safety and health of our nation's students.

The President is calling for an increase in the use of school resource officers (SROs), and states that the existing COPS program resources could be reoriented to give police departments an incentive to hire up to 1,000 school resource officers and school-based mental health professionals. While an increase in counselors and mental health professionals in schools can do much to improve school climate and provide supports to teachers and school communities, research on the effectiveness of SROs is limited and mixed; several studies show that SROs have little to no impact on school crime and violence, and security guards may even lead to more disorder.¹ Worse yet, the presence of SROs in schools also leads to needless referrals of youth to court for minor school code infractions and can push youth onto a path of school failure and delinquency.²

In fact, the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education concluded in a study of all known school shootings between 1974 and 2000 that law enforcement personnel do not stop most school shootings. Instead, they found that “[m]ost school-based attacks were stopped through intervention by school administrators, educators and students-or by the attacker stopping

¹ Justice Policy Institute, “*Education Under Arrest: the Case Against Police in Schools*” (November 2011):10-11, accessed January 7, 2013,

http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf.

² Justice Policy Institute, “*Education Under Arrest*,” 13-20.

on his own.” This is largely because these incidents are usually very short, many lasting 15 minutes or less.³

As a result, instead of increasing the number of SROs, schools should take a more effective—and less costly—approach to school security. For instance, some concrete steps can be taken to improve the security of school campuses by adding things like cameras, shatterproof glass, and security systems to protect children in school in ways that do not have the negative effects of SROs. A truly successful path to safer schools, however — according to the U.S. Secret Service, the Department of Education, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police — would be to encourage school administrators and communities to develop prevention measures and crisis management plans. When combined with good communication within the school and community to identify and address potential threats, a climate of connectedness within the school so that everyone feels that he or she belongs, and support and mental health services for those who need them, schoolchildren, staff, and surrounding communities can create a recipe for genuine safety.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, prevention programs have broad benefits for students and school communities because they:

- lower rates of delinquency, disruptive behaviors, harassment, bullying, suicide, and all other forms of violence and antisocial behavior;
- increase the likelihood troubled youth will be identified and receive treatment;
- improve the learning environment by reducing intimidating, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior; and
- prepare communities for responding to not only shootings at schools, but also all other human-made and natural disasters.⁴

Given the potential negative effects of SROs on teen success in school and later life, the U.S. Department of Justice should require that:

- Any new SROs hired under the President’s proposal should have training on child and adolescent development and how to interact with children and teens.
- SROs should also receive specialized training in youth development, working with youth with disabilities, de-escalating potentially violent situations, and recognizing and assisting youth with mental health needs, including trauma.
- School officials and SROs should also clarify their roles and responsibilities through a formal memorandum of understanding that covers the broad spectrum of inappropriate youth behavior, with specific attention to what types of behavior truly necessitate a court referral. It should also be clear how SROs will communicate with school staff and

³ U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, *Threat Assessment in Schools: a Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* (Washington, D.C.: May 2002), at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

⁴ See the International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence, 2nd Edition* (2009):1, at <http://www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/pdfs/schoolviolence2.pdf>.

administrators during an incident that threatens the safety of students and how to determine who is in charge during a crisis.

- Data on police activity and court referrals — broken down by race and ethnicity of students involved — should be collected and reported to state and local governments.
- School districts and local juvenile justice systems should be required to work together to minimize the use of police in student discipline, and the number of students suspended or expelled from school, especially for minor infractions.

NJJN strongly advises against any increase in SROs in schools and recommends that government and school officials take a sensible approach to addressing school violence that is proven to keep children, staff and communities safe.

The National Juvenile Justice Network is made up of 43 juvenile justice coalitions and organizations in 33 states that advocate for state and federal laws, policies and practices that are fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate for all children, youth and families involved in—or at risk of becoming involved in—the justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.