

June 8, 2020

Lovely Warren, Mayor of Rochester
Loretta C. Scott, President of City Council
Willie J. Lightfoot, Vice President of City Council
Malik D. Evans, Councilmember
Mitchell D. Gruber, Councilmember
Jacklyn Ortiz, Councilmember
LaShay D. Harris, Councilmember
Mary Lupien, Councilmember
Michael A. Patterson, Councilmember
Jose Peo, Councilmember
30 Church St.
Rochester, NY 14614

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

We applaud your decision to end the contract between the City of Rochester and the Rochester City School District (RCSD) for 12 School Resource Officers (SROs). Just this past week Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Portland, Oregon announced the end of their SRO programs. By the time you read this letter it is likely many other cities will have joined them. Please ensure Rochester is one of those cities by announcing publicly as a unified body that you intend to end the program and vote to do so on June 16th.

We know of incidents of students as young as 7 years old being led out of school buildings in handcuffs at the RCSD. A publicly available security report from 2018 details multiple incidents where students were restrained in handcuffs, including one incident where no physical altercation took place. The permanent presence of armed police on school grounds may unintentionally lead to the criminalization of youth for normal adolescent behavior. This is part of what is called the school-to-prison pipeline. Students of color are pushed out of school and towards incarceration through exclusionary discipline and forced interactions with the criminal justice system.

The students who are detained and arrested by police are disproportionately black males and students of color. A report by the New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force from 2012, found black students in NYC public schools were 14 times as likely to be arrested as their white peers. Studies from other states like Connecticut and Alabama have showed similar disproportionate arrest rates by race when SROs are present.

From a research perspective there is no consensus on whether or not the presence of police in schools make them safer, and in fact some studies suggest the exact opposite. One recent study published in the

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management by Dr. Emily K. Weisburst from UCLA, showed that grants to hire more police officers in Texas high schools and middle schools were associated with a 6% higher rate of disciplinary incidents, a 2.5% decrease in graduation rates, and 4.5% decrease in college enrollment compared to similar students at other schools.

Keeping students safe, and helping them thrive academically, are top priorities for every school district. There is no clear evidence the presence of armed police officers on school grounds contribute to either of these goals and some evidence to suggest the opposite. Most concerning, SROs contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline which pushes black students and students of color out of school and into prison.

The \$1.5 million spent by the RCSD on police officers every year could go towards research-based interventions for students like social workers, counselors, and staff focused on violence prevention. Schools must provide the social-emotional support students need during this very difficult time.

We urge you follow through on your budget proposal to eliminate the School Resource Officer program at the RCSD. We cannot wait to celebrate with you this great achievement in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline in Rochester.

Sincerely,

Action for a Better Community

Alliance for Quality Education

American Academy of Pediatrics NYS Chapter 1

Asbury First United Methodist Church

The Avenue Blackbox Theatre & The Avenue Children's Theatre Project

Catholic Family Center

Citizen Action of New York

Community Task Force on School Climate

Foodlink

Golisano Children's Hospital

IBERO American Action League

Teen Empowerment

The Children's Agenda

Empire Justice Center

Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives

Healthi Kids Coalition

New York Civil Liberties Union

Roc/ACTS

Rochester Area Community Foundation

Rochester Black Nurses Association

Rochester Regional Coalition Against Human Trafficking

St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center

Shades of Sisterhood

Society for the Protection and Care of Children

Teen Activist Project

True Insights Consulting LLC

Urban League of Rochester

YWCA

Harry Bronson, New York State Assemblymember 138th District

The Reverend James C. Simmons, Pastor of Baber African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Robert J. Schrader, Pastor of Peace of Christ Parish

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, (Rev. Johanna Rehbaum, Pastor)

In Christ New Hope Ministry (Roger L. Breedlove, Pastor)

Toyin Anderson, RCSD parent and member of National Parent Leadership Training Institute

Barb Van Kerkhove, RCSD parent and Community Task Force on School Climate member