H.648 (Khan)/S.286 (Chandler):
An Act Relative to Safer Schools

Last year, Massachusetts stopped requiring that all school districts be assigned at least one school resource officer (SRO). An Act Relative to Safer Schools would limit the use of police powers in school while providing grants for districts to develop more holistic safety practices that do not rely on school-based policing.

H.648/S.286 would:

- Draw the line between student behavior and criminal offense by limiting SROs' involvement to matters that “involve real and substantial harm or threat of harm,”
- Require SROs to use “de-escalation and anti-bias” techniques, per POST certification;
- Collect better data on student-police interactions, including school-based searches;
- Require districts to report policing data and costs to qualify for assignment of SROs;
- Create grants for school safety models that do not rely school-based policing, like:
  - Oakland, CA, which hired “peacekeepers” with ties to students and the community, to help with arrival, dismissal, and transitions in the school day.
  - Denver, CO, which is using funds saved from ending its police contract to provide greater social/emotional/mental health supports to students.

Placing police in schools often devolves into police serving as school disciplinarians. Such reliance does not make schools safer, but does increase court involvement for youth, damaging students’ educational futures in the process. Meanwhile, our state’s ratio of students to counselors, 304:1, fails to meet the nationally recommended ratio (250:1).

The state reports that schools and police are not complying with reforms. Many cities did not adopt the policing agreements required by the Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA). Fewer still report data required by law: Boston, Springfield, Worcester, and Lowell reported 4 school-based arrests between them in 2019, 110 fewer than Boston had alone.

Massachusetts school districts are already moving away from school-based police. Worcester has removed its SROs from school buildings for the rest of the year, and its City Council has given approval to end the program entirely. Somerville has suspended its SRO program, and Northampton eliminated its SRO program after reducing its police budget last year. Schools need new models for safety.

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5 Alexis Stern and Anthony Petrosino, What Do We Know About the Effects of School-Based Law Enforcement on School Safety? (2018).
7 American Civil Liberties Union, Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students (2019).
8 Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board, Early Impacts of an Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform 65 (2019).
9 Milton Valencia & Meghan Irons, Amid Nationwide Movement to Reform Policing, Some Call on Boston to Remove Officers from Schools, Bos. Globe (Jun. 16 2020); Sarah Betancourt, Districts Coming up Short on Reporting School-Based Arrests, Comm. Mag. (Sept. 18, 2020)
10 Scott O’Connell, Resource Officers No Longer in Schools as Worc. Students Return to In-Person Learning, Tele. & Gazette (Mar. 17, 2021).

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