Fact Sheet: H.694 (Sabadosa)
An Act Relative to the Location of School Resource Officers
Coalition for Smart Responses to Student Behavior

All parents, students, and teachers want schools to be safe, but there are increasing doubts that placing police in schools makes them so. Last year, the legislature ended a state requirement that all school districts be assigned at least one school resource officer (SRO).¹

H.694, An Act Relative to the Location of School Resource Officers, would:
• Remove SROs from schools, locating them at the nearest police station, and
• Task SROs as the primary responders to school-based emergencies.

Why it is needed:

Placing police in schools has not resulted in improved school safety.² In fact, it may hinder the trust and communication schools need to be safe. A 2020 study found that school police placement led to increased reliance on surveillance, unreasonable search and seizure, inappropriate sharing of confidential information, and an emphasis on formal controls that create an environment of fear and distrust, diminishing students’ willingness to confide in school staff when they are experiencing problems.³ There is documented misunderstanding between police officers and school administrators on the role of police in schools in Massachusetts.⁴

Massachusetts school districts are already moving away from school-based policing. 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.⁵ Somerville has suspended its SRO program.⁶ Northampton eliminated its SRO program after reducing its police budget last year.⁷ Students and parents across the state are urging their own schools to follow suit.

Relocating SROs to police stations enables them to respond to school emergencies without having to address school discipline matters. Police are not school disciplinarians. Nor are their tools (e.g., arrest, court referral) appropriate responses to routine school misbehavior. Nonetheless, SROs often become the school’s default disciplinarians, undermining the effectiveness of their role.⁸ Districts like Bridgeport, CT, reduced their school-based arrests, particularly for more minor incidents, after relocating SROs from school grounds.⁹ Milwaukee, WI, followed suit this year as well.

Please contact Rep. Sabadosa regarding co-sponsorship.
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²Alexis Stern and Anthony Petrosino, What Do We Know About the Effects of School-Based Law Enforcement on School Safety? (2018).
⁴Johanna Wald and Lisa Thurau, First, Do No Harm (2010).
⁵Scott O’Connell, Resource Officers No Longer in Schools as Worc. Students Return to In-Person Learning, Tele. & Gazette (Mar. 17, 2021).
⁸See, First, Do No Harm, supra note 4.
⁹Marc Donald & Robert Francis, Defining Defunding the Police to Help Our Community, CT Mirror (Aug. 5 , 2020).