

H.517 (Rep. Khan)/S.300 (Sen. Kennedy): An Act Relative to Safer Schools

In 2020, Massachusetts took a positive step in making schools safer and more equitable by shifting the decision to assign school resource officers from the state to local superintendents.¹ *An Act Relative to Safer Schools* would provide support for districts that want to develop more holistic safety practices that do not rely on school-based policing and clarify the parameters for appropriate use of police powers in schools.

H.517/S.300 would:

- 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.
- Draw the line between student behavior which should be addressed by school officials and that which constitutes a criminal offense, codifying language developed by Massachusetts’ [Model SRO Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) Commission](#);
- Align SROs’ interventions with “de-escalation and anti-bias” techniques they receive training in for [POST certification](#);
- Collect better data on student-police interactions (e.g., arrests citations, searches);
- Require compliance with the reporting mandates of the Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2018 and the police reforms of 2020 as a condition/prerequisite for SRO assignment

Here’s why H.517/S.300 is needed:

Placing police in schools often devolves into using [police as disciplinarians](#). Research shows [that such reliance does not have a positive effect on school safety](#), but does increase court involvement for youth, especially for Black and Latinx students, [damaging students’ educational futures](#) and leading the *Globe* to call it a “[cop out](#)” on school safety. Meanwhile, our state’s ratio of students to counselors [fails](#) to meet the national recommendation.

The state reports that schools and police are not complying with reforms. Many cities [did not adopt](#) policing agreements required by law. [Fewer still report required data](#). Only 54 of our 289 school districts reported any school-based arrests or police referrals last year, and some of them are likely undercounting: Statewide, the number of school-based arrests reported last year (94) is less than [what Boston had alone](#) in 2019 (114).

Schools want new models for safety and need support in implementing them. [Worcester removed police](#) from its school buildings. [Somerville](#), [Brookline](#), and [Northampton](#) eliminated their SRO programs entirely. **H.517/S.300’s grant program will support Massachusetts school districts that are committed to a multi-disciplinary approach to school safety.**

¹ Mass. Acts of 2020, c. 253, § 79 (amending G.L. c. 71 §37P).

Please Send Request via LAWS to Co-Sponsor
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