



What the Research Shows: Sexual Misconduct and Gender Discrimination by School Resource Officers (SROs)

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SROs Are “Significantly More Likely” Than Other Police to Be Arrested for Sex-Related Offensesⁱ

- **When SROs are arrested, the most common reason is for a sex-related crime with a female student as the victim.** A 2014 national study found that SROs are significantly more likely than other police officers to be arrested for sex-related crimes. Most arrests of SROs are for sex-related crimes in which the SRO targeted a victim enrolled at the school where they were employed. Incidents included:
 - One SRO sent sexually explicit texts to a student enrolled in the SRO's junior cadet program.
 - At another school, officials expressed concerns about the SRO's interactions with a female student. That SRO was later arrested and charged with having sex with the student.ⁱⁱ
- **Most SROs arrested for sex-related offenses against students have worked in a school for more than 2 years.** The longer an SRO remains at a school, the more non-law-enforcement roles they assume, thus increasing opportunities for informal interaction with students.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **SRO roles and autonomy in schools make it hard to prevent these abuses of power.** SROs can operate with little oversight because their immediate supervisors are usually located off-site at local police departments and often supervise SROs at multiple schools.^{iv} Many SROs are encouraged to develop closer, non-police relationships with students, which can lead to inappropriate interactions.^v Similarly, CPS security guards are four times as likely as teachers to be the subject of a sexual misconduct complaint.^{vi}
- **Female students do not feel safer in schools with SROs.** One national study found that female students were less likely than male students to report they felt safe at school, and that there was no link between interacting with an SRO and feeling safer at school.^{vii}

SROs Police and Enforce Gender and Sexuality Norms, Leading to Disparate Harm to Black Girls

- **Black girls are disproportionately targeted for arrest and discipline at school.** Nationally, Black girls in high school are 6x more likely to be suspended than white girls; 4x more likely to be arrested; 3x more likely to be restrained; and 3x more likely to be referred to law enforcement.^{viii}
- **SROs commonly enforce gender norms against girls of color, for example by urging them to act more “ladylike.”** A 2017 national report interviewed SROs and found that many routinely stated that girls of color should behave “like a lady” or otherwise adhere to traditional gender roles.^{ix} Girls of color reported instances of racial and gender bias by SROs, including in discipline for dress code violations.
- **SROs in CPS have a history of responding to Black female students with excessive, abusive physical force – leading to costly lawsuits against the City.**
 - In 2014, the City of Chicago settled a lawsuit with a Black female CPS student for \$100,000 after 2 male officers at her high school pushed her to the floor, pinned her down, contorted her body, handcuffed her, and arrested her.^x
 - The same year, the City settled a different lawsuit with another Black female CPS student for \$15,000 after a male SRO took her into custody, handcuffed her to another student, and struck her in the face with his hand. Despite having 8 Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA) complaints filed against him, this officer continued to work at the student's school.^{xi}
 - Lawsuits filed against the City of Chicago for SRO misconduct cost taxpayers over \$2 million between 2012-2016.^{xii}

Punitive Discipline Policies Harm LGBTQ and Gender Non-Conforming Youth, Especially Those of Color

- **LGBTQ youth, particularly those of color, are disproportionately disciplined and arrested at school.** LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk than their non-LGBTQ peers for facing school discipline like suspension, expulsion, and arrest, but do not engage in illegal behavior any more than their non-LGBTQ peers.^{xiii} Sixty percent of LGBTQ students report being disciplined because of their identity as an LGBTQ person. And LGBTQ students of color are almost 2x as likely to be suspended compared to their white LGBTQ peers.^{xiv}
- **LGBTQ youth face increased discrimination, harassment, and bullying from their peers at school and are often punished as a result.** LGBTQ youth face punishment for defending themselves from bullying, or for violating gender and sexuality norms including gendered dress codes.^{xv}

What Works: Cultivating School Climates Free of Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, & Sexual Assault

- **Adequately fund and support mental health professionals in schools,** who are specifically trained to provide resources and interventions to students facing adverse experiences.^{xvi}
- **Ensure all professionals in schools receive appropriate training to support all students,** regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.^{xvii}
- **Replace traditional school discipline practices with restorative justice programs, which decrease violence and disciplinary issues and have already been successful in CPS.** One report found that CPS schools that consistently implemented restorative justice programs saw decreases in violence and disciplinary issues and improved school culture and performance.^{xviii}

ⁱ Philip Matthew Stinson & Adam M. Watkins, *The Nature of Crime by School Resource Officers: Implications for SRO Programs* 6 (2014), available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244014521821>.

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*

^{iv} *Id.*

^v *Id.*; see also Matthew Theriot and John Orme, *School Resource Officers and Students' Feelings of Safety at School* (2016), Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matthew_Theriot2/publication/285980423_School_ResourceOfficers_and_Students'_Feelings_of_Safety_at_School/links/5aae71d6458515ecebe96b8f/School-Resource-Officers-and-Students-Feelings-of-Safety-at-School.pdf.

^{vi} Hannah Leone, *CPS investigating hundreds of sexual misconduct claims against staff, many involving security guards; 23 employees fired* (June 25, 2019), Chicago Tribune, available at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-public-schools-student-sexual-abuse-inspector-general-20190725-mgjin5ejofdbjuu4tzw5vxcta-story.html>.

^{vii} Theriot and Orme, *supra* note v.

^{viii} Monique W. Morris, *Pushout Fact Sheet* (2018), available at: <https://pushoutfilm.com/factsheet> (adapted from U.S. DOE, *Discipline Data for Girls in US Public Schools* (2018)).

^{ix} Monique W. Morris, Rebecca Epstein, & Aishatu Yusuf, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, *Be Her Resource: A Toolkit About School Resource Officers and Girls of Color* 20 (2018), available at: https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/05/17_SRO-final-Acc.pdf.

^x Shriver Center, *Handcuffs in Hallways: The State of Policing in Chicago Public Schools* 11 (Feb. 2017), available at: <https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf>.

^{xi} *Id.*

^{xii} *Id.*

^{xiii} CA LGBTA Health & Human Service Network & NorCal Mental Health America, *LGBTQ Youth & the School-to-Prison Pipeline* 2 (2017), available at: <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/bhd/info/Documents/LGBTQ%20Resources/O4MH/o4mh-schooltoprisonpipeline-factsheet-00-00-00.pdf>.

^{xiv} *Id.*

^{xv} *Id.*

^{xvi} *Id.*

^{xvii} See *id.*

^{xviii} Humera Nayeb & Amy Meek, Chi. Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, *What the Research Shows: The Impact of School Resource Officers* (Jun. 23, 2020), <https://www.clccrul.org/blog/2020/6/23/research-sros>.