

Re: SF3534

Chair Latz and Committee Members:

I am writing to you as a career educator and in my individual capacity as a Hopkins School Board Director to express deep concern regarding police use of force on children in our schools.

In Hopkins Schools, we have spent the last four years investing in a districtwide restorative culture and holistic safety model (based on what numerous studies have shown fosters school safety) instead of a model that relies on regular police presence and the criminalization of children. In the creation of this model, we were especially concerned about the disproportionate impact of police in schools on Black, brown, LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse children.

One of the many factors that led to this decision was community concern regarding police use of force, including prone holds, on students. Another factor was a lack of policy, training, and accountability for SROs across the state. I do not support the weakening or repeal of legislation that protects students from the danger of prone restraints by SROs. I would support a robust rulemaking process that includes school board members, professional education associations, and community groups working with the POST Board to create SRO policy and training protocols. This would align the role and requirements of SROs with other professionals who work in our schools (social workers, nurses, etc.), undergo extensive training, and are held to high standards when interacting with our children.

I appreciate your time and work on this issue. Thank you for reading my testimony.

Sincerely,

Jen Westmoreland (she/her)