

Florida State Conference of the NAACP  
397 West Church Street  
Orlando, FL 32801

April 18, 2013

Florida Legislators  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100



Dear Legislators:

All across this country, our nation is engaged in a debate on school safety and gun violence. Florida is no exception. Keeping our children safe is the absolute highest priority. However, in our quest to protect children, we cannot lose sight of our collective responsibility to thoughtfully research best practices for school safety. Data shows that some of the most effective ways to protect our young people include investing in counselors and psychologists; increasing the presence of parents and volunteers to foster stronger adult-student relationships; instituting proven programs that reduce violence like conflict resolution initiatives; and securing school entrances with locks.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, there are a number of measures before this august body that call for things that give the appearance of safety but will not keep our children safe. Instead, they will lead to unintended consequences and ineffective use of law enforcement. HB 1097, sponsored by Representative Steube, seeks to bring more guns into our public, private and parochial schools by allowing teachers and school staff members to carry concealed weapons. Teachers are there to educate, and should not be asked to bring guns into the classroom.<sup>2</sup> Instead they should be trained to spot warning signs that allow schools to prevent violence before it starts. The last thing we need is deadly weapons near our most precious asset, our children.

Another such measure, SB 514, sponsored by Senator Sobel, will levy a new tax on Floridians to pay for expanded armed guards in schools. This is a bad idea, and not simply because it will create a new financial burden on Floridians.<sup>3</sup> Sen. Sobel's approach, though well-intended, will not protect kids and may actually have the unintended consequence of funneling children directly from the classroom to the criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup>

As you know, the Sunshine State is one of several states that currently has police

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<sup>1</sup> Advancement Project, *A Real Fix: A Gun Free Way to School Safety*, March 2013 <http://safequalityschools.org/resources/entry/school-safety-plan>

<sup>2</sup> Florida Education Association, *Educators Oppose NRA Plans for Guns in Schools*, March 2013 <http://feaweb.org/educators-oppose-nra-plan-for-guns-in-schools>

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Crews, Angela Crews and Catherine Burton, *The Only Thing That Stops a Guy with a Bad Policy is a Guy with a Good Policy: An Examination of the NRA's "National School Shield" Proposal*, American Journal of Criminal Justice, March 2013 <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12103-013-9202-x>

<sup>4</sup> Advancement Project, Alliance for Education Justice Dignity in Schools Campaign and NAACP Legal Defense Fund, *Police in Schools are Not the Answer to the Newtown Shooting*, January 2013 <http://safequalityschools.org/resources/entry/police-in-schools-are-not-the-answer-to-the-newtown-shooting>

in schools. The results have been disastrous. During the 2011-2012 school year, more than 12,500 Florida students were arrested at school.<sup>5</sup> Yes, that's right - over 12,500 children arrested on the playground. The vast majority of these arrests were for minor student misbehavior rather than for real crimes. For instance, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade special needs student was arrested and charged with battery for throwing a lollipop at another student on the school bus.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of stopping crime – which rarely happens on school grounds – the real impact of armed guards in schools is a dramatic increase in students arrested for minor misbehaviors. Children are being arrested, handcuffed and treated as criminals for things like violating a dress code, talking back to a teacher, bringing a cell phone to school and other minor misbehaviors that would be better solved by a counselor or a trip to the principal's office.

We have seen students as young as 5 arrested for temper tantrums and other minor misbehaviors. Research shows that youth of color, students with disabilities and LGBTQ students are more likely to be arrested in school, usually for the same behavior as their peers. The result is more students funneled into the juvenile justice system and being pushed out of school, instead of being channeled into career or college. This has long-term negative impacts, and is ultimately hurts us all. Rather than furthering this disturbing trend, you can help end it by supporting proposals like SB 1374.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, using scarce funds to put more police in schools creates a hostile learning environment and diverts resources from the activities that keep our children safe – curtailing the violence that mostly occurs off school grounds.

As you continue to deliberate this and other similar measures, I hope you'll research the unintended consequences of each proposal and opt for solutions that not only feel good, but are good.

Thanks in advance for your time and attention to this very serious issue.

Sincerely,

**Florida State Conference of the NAACP  
Power U Center for Social Change  
Dream Defenders  
Advancement Project  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Project Knucklehead  
University of Miami School of Law's Historic Black Church Program  
University of Miami School of Law's Center for Ethic and Public Service**

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<sup>5</sup> FL Dept. of Juvenile Justice, *Delinquency in Schools*, January 2013 [http://www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/comm/fy-2011-12-delinquency-in-schools-analysis-\(final-release\)-\(1-3-2012\).pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/comm/fy-2011-12-delinquency-in-schools-analysis-(final-release)-(1-3-2012).pdf?sfvrsn=2)

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Gonzalez, *How School Zero Tolerance Rules Turn Bad Behavior Into A Crime*, NPR State Impact, February 25, 2013 <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida/maps/map-florida-students-arrested-for-bad-behavior-not-criminal-behavior/>

<sup>7</sup> *Help, Not Handcuffs*, Miami Herald, April 08, 2013 <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/04/07/3325831/help-nothandcuffs.html>

