



TITLE II

ELIMINATING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

We, the People, call for the elimination of the school-to-prison pipeline. We seek to shift our schools from a punitive discipline structure and make investments in alternative conflict resolution and restorative practices.

The People's Process captured expressed frustrations and continuous concerns about the negative physical and emotional impacts on students, their families, and the community of having police officers in schools. Community members stated that our educational system facilitates incarceration because our children's behaviors are treated punitively and often with police officers.

School resource officers, law enforcement officers with arrest powers who often handle students punitively, supplant necessary resources that communities could invest in positive behavior interventions and trauma-informed services. Many school districts and schools in our communities invest more in school resource officers instead of positive support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other trained support personnel who are severely underfunded and understaffed.²⁶ The presence of police officers in schools inherently leads to criminalizing our children's behavior.²⁷ These investments reinforce schools as places of punishment and surveillance not learning, nourishment, and support.

Lawmakers must revise educational policies that result in the suspension and expulsion of children, which start as early as preschool and are critical in driving students away from schools and funneling them into prisons. Many children in our communities are not having their basic needs met and often act out due to the subsequent trauma and stress.²⁸ Many of our schools are ill-equipped with behavioral

interventions such as proper health screenings, therapists, psychologists, and other resources.²⁹ Our government should incentivize schools in our communities to implement restorative practices and other interventions that improve the well-being of students, enhance their school climate, strengthen relationships, and build community as alternatives to suspensions and expulsions.

Zero-tolerance policies continue to push our children out of school and into the legal system from cradle to career. They normalize a false narrative that our children must be surveilled and policed in educational settings and for most of their waking hours. Under these failed policies, Black students experience suspensions and expulsions three times more than white students, and Black and Brown students account for 70% of police referrals.³⁰ What remains disturbing is that Black boys experience much higher expulsion rates in preschool. In a 2021 study, half of the 17,000 preschool students suspended or expelled nationwide were Black boys, despite only representing about 20% of enrolled children.³¹

A primary cause for these rates is that teachers find Black and Brown students' behaviors more problematic compared to white students in both the preschool and the K-12 system, even when there are no differences in behavior.³² What is identified as problematic behavior is often subjective.³³ Studies point to a "culture clash" in the educational setting, as 79% of K-12 teachers are white³⁴—meaning they can find Black and Brown students' behaviors problematic due to implicit bias and societal norms that stem from white supremacy.



Zero-tolerance policies give uncontested permission to school leaders, teachers, and staff to respond with bias and racism to our children's behaviors.³⁵ But these adults face little to no accountability, despite the expectation that we should trust them with our children's educational development. Instead, our children and their families are burdened with the consequences of these failed policies that can alter their lives, including robbing them of their liberties and basic human needs. Our government must provide support for teachers to be continuously trained on implicit bias, cultural competency, and behavioral supports, with accountability measures.

As part of Title II, our policy framework shifts schools from a punitive discipline structure to a safe, supportive learning environment by investing in alternative conflict resolution and restorative practices. This includes building new programs and structures to address conflicts and student misbehavior and requiring a more holistic approach to addressing other issues throughout schools. We place a special focus on improving staff-student ratios, particularly with mental and behavioral health personnel.

We call for lawmakers to:

- Prohibit federal funding for school resource officers.
- Prohibit the use of private police in schools.
- Provide federal grants to schools to implement restorative and transformative justice programs and other alternative conflict resolution models.
- Provide support to school districts to hire more school-based counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other trained mental health professionals.
- Prohibit zero-tolerance policies from schools receiving federal funding.
- Provide resources to schools to increase evidence-based intervention programming for children at risk of discipline or becoming out-of-school youth, including after-school programs, community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and programs that promote imagination for children.
- Require schools to conduct healthcare screenings for children in K-12 and make appropriate referrals, including to mental health treatment providers.
- Provide grants to states for teacher training, continuing education, and professional development, especially for behavior management and supports.
- Prohibit schools from allowing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on campus.



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This title proposes the following provisions for lawmakers to make law:

- **Sec. 201. Discontinuation of School Resource Officer funding.** Prohibits federal funding for school resource officers (SROs). *SROs are law enforcement officers with arrest powers working in schools.*
- **Sec. 202. Restorative and transformative justice grants.** Provides grants to schools to implement restorative and transformative justice programs and other alternative conflict resolution models that improve the well-being of students and school climate. *Restorative and transformative justice are conflict resolution practices that repair harm through healing, health, and accountability for all involved, including communities. These conflict resolution practices also work toward systems change.*
- **Sec. 203. Counselors in schools.** Provides support to school districts to hire more school-based counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other trained mental health professionals.
- **Sec. 204. Ending mandatory expulsion/suspension.** Prohibits zero-tolerance policies from schools receiving federal funding.
- **Sec. 205. Intervention strategies in school systems.** Provides resources to schools to increase evidence-based intervention programming for children at risk of discipline or at risk of becoming out-of-school youth, including after-school programs, community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and programs that promote imagination for children.
- **Sec. 206. Healthcare Screenings.** Requires schools to conduct healthcare screenings for children in K-12 and make appropriate referrals, including to mental health treatment providers.
- **Sec. 207. Investments in teacher training.** Provides grants to states for teacher training, continuing education, and professional development, especially for behavior management and supports.
- **Sec. 208. Prohibit the use of private police in schools.**
- **Sec. 209. Prohibit schools from allowing the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on campus.** *ICE is a federal law enforcement agency under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security charged with enforcing immigration laws.*