

PRESS RELEASE

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ORGANIZATIONS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS CALL FOR NEW SCHOOL SAFETY APPROACH AS OHIO STUDENTS RETURN TO SCHOOL

Safety Should Focus on Increased Supports for Students

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Today – as many Ohio students are returning to school – a broad coalition of organizations and Ohio students and teachers kicked off their #counselorsnotcuffs campaign by releasing a set of school safety principles.

In Ohio and across the nation, high profile school shootings have led to discussions around school safety. In July, the Ohio legislature passed HB 318, which included \$12 million in funding for school safety. Originally, this funding could have been spent on security hardware items such as riot shields and gun lockers in schools, which thankfully was removed from the bill during the legislative process. The final bill signed by the Governor allows this funding to be used for 1) school resource officer certification and training, 2) active shooter and school safety training, 3) educational resources, and 4) training to identify and assist students with mental health issues. HB 318 includes an additional \$2 million in grants for schools to improve their school climate by implementing positive behavior intervention and supports frameworks and evidence- and research-based social-emotional learning initiatives.

While physical security is a necessary part of any school safety equation, research shows that increasing security measures (i.e. more cameras) can actually cause students to feel less safe. Tracy Nejera with the Children’s Defense Fund of Ohio, which re-released a brief on SROs today, said “Our children need solutions that address crisis situations as well as the everyday social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health challenges that, left unresolved, can grow into a crisis. The #counselorsnotcuffs evidence-based strategies keep schools safe and intervene for students at risk of harming themselves or others.”

Instead, research shows that school safety is best addressed by 1) improving school climates and increasing access to school-based addiction and mental health services and licensed prevention and treatment professionals, such as counselors, social workers, and nurses and 2) putting in place research-based protocols to address threats and creating agreements with local law enforcement to respond to emergencies.

The #counselorsnotcuffs principles (attached to this document) call on Ohio to invest in a two-pronged research-driven, effective approach to school safety that invests in Ohio’s students to keep them safe, healthy, and on the right track.

Teresa Lampl with The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers said “Investments that create routine access to school-based and mental health and addiction services are effective, trauma-informed strategies to prevent and treat mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in children in a familiar and accessible setting. Over half of all behavioral health conditions begin before age 14; three-fourths by age 24. Collaboration and partnership between schools and licensed behavioral health prevention and treatment professionals will not only improve school safety, but help our students succeed in school, family, and community.”

“I don’t feel safe with police in my school. I’d rather have counselors listening to me and understanding my problems instead of being thrown on the ground and maced like I’ve been,” said Adria Dawson, an Ohio student with Voices of the Unheard. “Counselors would understand where students are coming from and be able to stop conflicts before a fight. Counselors also would give kids someone to talk to and help solve their problems.”

The #counselorsnotcuffs campaign will continue to call for school safety money to be directed toward improving school climates and increasing access to school-based addiction and mental health services and licensed prevention and treatment professionals, such as counselors, social workers, and nurses, through the implementation of HB 318 grants and as Ohio considers its next budget.