

March 13, 2018



**SUPPORT POSITIVE SOLUTIONS TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE IN SCHOOLS, OPPOSE  
CRIMINALIZATION OF OUR YOUTH**

Dear Representative,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to **oppose H.R. 4909, the Student, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Act of 2018** and instead support measures to build positive school climates, provide students needed support, and ensure schools are welcoming and safe for all children. Our children deserve positive solutions to keep them safe in schools, not proposals such as H.R. 4909, which would exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline crisis, further criminalize historically marginalized children, and increase the militarization of, and over-policing in, schools and communities of color.

There is no doubt that Congress must address the unconscionable rise in school shootings over the past few years. The Leadership Conference believes that all children deserve to feel safe and supported in schools. Evidence has consistently demonstrated that increasing policing in schools is the wrong approach to keeping children safe.<sup>1</sup> H.R. 4909 would provide federal funding for states and districts to invest in anonymous systems for reporting threats of school violence, to coordinate with local law enforcement, and to invest in new infrastructure for school security. While well-intended, these approaches threaten students' civil rights and would likely harm students of color, students with disabilities, immigrant students, LGBTQ students, and religious minorities – without providing for meaningful improvement to school safety and climate.

While permitting states and districts to establish systems where individuals can anonymously report threats as specified in H.R. 4909 could assist school officials in taking preventative measures, there is no language included to guarantee that accused students will receive fair treatment, equal protection under the law, and a right to due process. We are even more concerned that grant eligibility was expanded to all schools, which would include private schools. Without robust oversight and enforcement of federal civil rights protections, it is possible that federal funds could be directed to schools that discriminate against students.

We are further concerned that H.R. 4909 would allow for the coordination of school staff and local law enforcement and permit funding to include ineffective or harmful security measures. Without delineating specific and meaningful structures that would ensure the school staff who are making decisions about whether to involve local law enforcement have gathered enough information and have assessed alternate options prior to making the decision to criminalize students, this coordination could exacerbate increased negative contact between children and law enforcement. Racial bias and implicit bias against children of color in schools are contributing factors to pushing students out of schools and for arresting students for



minor behavioral offenses.<sup>ii</sup> We know that Black students are referred to law enforcement or are arrested at school twice as often as their White classmates, a disparity that cannot be explained by different rates in student behavior.<sup>iii</sup> Taken together, these factors can have a disproportionate negative impact on students of color, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities, and further contribute to their higher dropout rates.<sup>iv</sup>

What we need from Congress is support for students – not measures that will militarize our schools. These tragedies demand serious investments in evidence-based school safety measures<sup>v</sup>, including comprehensive action to address the availability of guns. For example, we know from federal data sources that school counselors play a central role in the lives of students and positively contribute to decreasing school dropout rates,<sup>vi</sup> yet 1.6 million students attend a school with some type of law enforcement agent, but do not have a school counselor.<sup>vii</sup> Congress should be investing more in solutions and strategies to meaningfully improve school safety including counselors, improving school climate, improving student engagement, and providing additional mental health supports.<sup>viii</sup>

The Leadership Conference supports safe communities and safe schools for all. For all the reasons stated above, we oppose this bill. I urge you to oppose H.R.4909 and instead invest in critical resources that promote a safe and supportive learning environment for our nation's students. If you have any questions, please contact me or director of education policy Liz King at (202) 466-0087 or [king@civilrights.org](mailto:king@civilrights.org).

Sincerely,

Vanita Gupta  
President & CEO

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<sup>i</sup> See <http://www.naacpldf.org/files/publications/Police%20in%20Schools%20are%20Not%20the%20Answer%20to%20the%20Newtown%20Shooting%20-%20Jan.%202013.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> See <https://advancementproject.org/resources/police-schools-not-answer-newtown-shooting/>

<sup>iii</sup> See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf> and [http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Disparity\\_NewResearch\\_010915.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Disparity_NewResearch_010915.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> See [http://lawcenter.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Protecting-Parkland-Generation\\_3.6.18.pdf](http://lawcenter.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Protecting-Parkland-Generation_3.6.18.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> See <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/09/the-neglected-link-in-the-high-school-to-college-pipeline/500213/>

<sup>vii</sup> See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> See

[https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/Rethinking\\_School\\_Safety\\_Key\\_Message.pdf](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/Rethinking_School_Safety_Key_Message.pdf)