



Frequently Asked Questions: Howard County School Resource Officers (SROs)

What is the primary purpose of SROs?

The goal of the SRO program is to build positive relationships with students and staff while providing a safe school environment. SROs serve as mentors, coaches, teachers and volunteers to support students during and after school hours.

The SROs bridge gaps between youth and law enforcement, creating positive interactions and understanding that transcend the school environment. These officers focus on restorative justice and help at-risk youth change behaviors that might otherwise lead to involvement with the criminal justice system. The SROs also oversee emergency planning and response at each of their respective schools.

How many arrests and referrals are there in the schools?

Arrests and referrals are an absolute last resort in the schools and have been declining in numbers. Most disciplinary action is handled administratively by the schools.

	<i>Suspensions</i>	<i>Arrests/Referrals</i>
2016-17	1,342	115 (22 in-custody* 93 paper referrals)
2017-18	1,430	88 (17 in-custody* 71 paper referrals)
2018-19	1,225	72 (12 in-custody* 60 paper referrals)

*These arrest and "in-custody" numbers are reported by **HCPSS** and may include other *non-arrest* incidents, like Emergency Petitions (EP) for mental health evaluation (see below). In an EP, a student is "in-custody" only for safe transport to the hospital, but is NOT arrested.

How are arrests, referrals and emergency petitions handled in schools?

More than 80 percent of arrests are non-custodial, meaning students are not handcuffed or taken into custody. Instead, most are simply released to a guardian with a referral to appear at a later time.

Students who threaten to harm themselves, or express a desire to hurt others, may be taken to the hospital for mental health intervention and evaluation, known as an "Emergency Petition" (EP). This process is used throughout the state for people in crisis and is NOT an arrest. In an EP, the person is handcuffed for their own safety and the safety of those around them for transport to the hospital. While an EP may look like an "in-custody" arrest, it is actually a non-punitive action intended to protect the student in a potentially dangerous situation.

What restorative justice and diversion programs are offered for students?

The HCPD offers a juvenile diversion program in which referrals are made to community-based support services to divert eligible juvenile cases from the criminal court system into remedial interventions to assist families in developing appropriate coping strategies.

The program includes Teen Court, which focuses on restorative justice and keeps young people out of the judicial system. Instead, first-time misdemeanor offenders can be diverted to Teen Court to face a jury of their peers. The teen jurors hear cases and render dispositions. The juveniles stay out of the traditional court system and have the opportunity to move forward without a criminal charge on their records.

What types of incidents do SROs handle?

In most incidents, an SRO is called by an administrator, teacher or other staff member to assist. In cases of last resort that result in arrest, most are incidents of violent behavior, usually attacks on other students. SROs also address drug dealing and possession in the schools, and disorderly conduct to a degree that disrupts school activities.

What do the SROs do outside of the schools and in the summer?

The SROs oversee many youth programs outside of school hours, including:

- P.L.E.D.G.E Leadership Camp
- BEARTRAX Program for 6th graders
- Diversion Program
- Teen Court
- Community Athletic Program (C.A.P.) mobile summer program
- Field trips to baseball games, zip lining, snow tubing, other activities
- Youth Police Academy
- Explorer Post Program
- Police Cadet Program
- Youth Advisory Council

How do SROs contribute to the school community?

Of the 19 SROs assigned to schools in Howard County, 15 serve as coaches in various youth programs. Many also sponsor basketball tournaments at their assigned schools, participate in after-school programs and take on various volunteer opportunities.

SROs also participate in classroom instruction. They help teach classes on a range of topics, including bullying, juvenile and adult law, constitutional law, search and seizure rights, and police-community relations. They also cover drug/alcohol abuse, mental health and suicide prevention, internet safety, vaping dangers, sexual/physical abuse, child exploitation and driver safety.

What is the cost of the SRO program?

There are no costs unique to the officers in the SRO program that aren't incurred for all officers in any other assignments, i.e. salary and standard equipment. If the SRO program were to be discontinued, there would be **zero cost savings** to the county or HCPSS. The current officers would remain employed by the HCPD and would be transferred to other assignments, freeing up \$0 in funding.

How often are complaints filed against SROs?

Complaints against SROs are extremely rare. There were zero in 2018, two in 2019 (both investigated through witnesses, video and other evidence, and not sustained), and zero in 2020.

What training do SROs receive?

SROs receive specialized training through the National Association of School Resource Officers, in addition to the extensive training all HCPD officers receive, which far exceeds the state requirements.

- Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)
- Fair and impartial policing
- Cultural awareness
- Youth services
- Mental health
- Active shooter
- Intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Critical incident stress management
- Verbal de-escalation techniques and active listening
- LGBTQ+ issues
- Autism awareness
- Hearing impairments
- Threat response to prevent school violence
- School safety and emergency operations plans
- Diversity
- Ethics and the SRO
- Students with special needs
- Social media
- School law
- Informal counseling and mentorship
- Understanding the teen brain
- Drugs and alcohol
- Violence and victimization
- Sex trafficking
- Youth trends and school culture