



4544 Sheppard Avenue East Suite 236, Toronto, Ontario, M1S 1V2

Office: 416-754-9529, Fax: 416-754-8529, info@maatlegal.ca, www.maatlegal.ca

April 9 2021

Attention: Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Trustees

My name is George Knia Singh and I am the Principal Lawyer for MA'AT Legal Services, herein "MA'AT". MA'AT is a Toronto-based Social Justice Law firm that focuses on Criminal Defence. However, since the public often experiences injustice in various other areas of the law, MA'AT Legal Services provides representation in other areas of the law such as Human Rights, Civil, Education and Police Complaint matters. We advocate on behalf of those that have been discriminated against, receive unfair treatment, and are trying to make a positive change in their lives.

MA'AT's Community Support and School Services Department shares directorship with the Toronto-based community organization, LAEN- The Latinx, Afro-Latin-America, Abya Yala Education Network through Director Silvia Argentina Arauz. In 2016, MA'AT accepted the role as lead legal counsel support for the community-driven campaign that resulted in the removal of the SRO-School Resource Officer program from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). We were already involved in the work of addressing the school-to-prison pipeline through legal challenges to racist suspensions, expulsions and other punitive disciplinary practices involving schools, police and BIPOC youth and have found this partnership supports the advocacy work of organizers that seek change through legally legitimate forms of activism.

In 2016-2017, MA'AT Legal Services co-facilitated several Know Your Rights workshops across the greater Toronto area, informing BIPOC students, parents, caregivers, school board educators and executive staff, as well as the community-at-large about their human rights in connection to Education and Policing. I implore your Board of Trustees to interrogate your policies and programs from an equity perspective, which will allow you to see where you are liable for not upholding the legal human rights of your stakeholders. In addition, MA'AT staff and I met with executive staff, school families, community organizers and activists to advocate for Africentric and Indigenous-centred school discipline practices, curriculum development and personnel hiring that are supportive of equity and human rights principles. It continues to be our stance that racialized, marginalized and underserved populations, such as communities of African descent/Black, and Indigenous communities are the most targeted and harmed by historical and present-day prejudicial policing institutions and programs. Testimonies from many of our predominantly Black youth clients at MA'AT were echoed in the data collected from the thousands of students at the TDSB for the TDSB Review of the SRO Program. Today, we continue this work today and work very closely with the TDSB that was the first to end the SRO program in Canada. TDSB Executive Staff often acknowledge the critical role that working closely with community partners served in advancing their understanding of equity within education.

In Ottawa, your school board has very similar situations playing out where many from your community are having their human rights violated through the presence of the police-in-schools program, namely your Ottawa-Carleton District School Board School Resource Officer Program. Locally in Ottawa, organizations like *Asilu Collective* have been working hard to highlight school-to-prison pipeline issues, including the immediate need for police-free schools. You must all understand that these issues are systemic and not solely specific to one location, therefore we are writing this letter in solidarity and support of *Asilu Collective* and all those who continue to advocate for police-free schools in Ottawa and beyond.

Sincerely,

George (Knia) Singh J.D.