

Statement To OCDSB regarding SRO Program

Good Evening Everyone

My name is Abdullah. I'm 16 years old and going into grade 11 at West Carleton Secondary School. I'd like to first begin by telling you a little about myself. I'm a practicing Muslim who was born in Amman Jordan as the only son to my mom, who fled Iraq before the start of the war. I lived in Jordan for 8 years before coming here and starting school with the OCDSB in grade 3 at Jack Donohue Public School. My mom and I came to Canada in search of a better life and a brighter future for me.

On Tuesday, while watching the Committee Meeting, I heard the statement made by one of the representatives, which genuinely disturbed me. It was regarding the removal of the SRO program in schools and placing strict guidelines on the interaction of police with racialized students.

I believe that I speak on behalf of many students when I say a decision to do that would be a misguided one and one that would lead to students fearing the police and law enforcement.

In my eyes, Ottawa police officers are highly trained individuals who have a broad set of skills that should be used to our advantage. In the statement made by the representative, it was stated that allowing the officers who are equipped with their sidearms into a classroom with elementary students is dangerous.

To me it seems as though it is thought that officers are just handed a badge and gun, then told to protect the public, it is quite the opposite, officers are highly trained individuals and carry their equipment in specialized holsters so, it is tough for anyone, but the officer to access them, also firearms do not spontaneously go off, as they are designed with various safeties in place and are highly maintained by OPS.

Furthermore, placing restrictions on officer interactions with racialized students says to everyone “ if your white you don't need to worry, only if your not” I believe instead of

attempting to reduce the presence of officers in schools, the presence should be kept the same or increased, this is so that we can teach the student how to interact with officers and to not fear them, and instead see them as friends and allies because the fear of law enforcement is the root of many crimes.

In addition, the representative did not have any evidence to prove that Student interactions with OPS were anything but professional and courteous, and when asked why it was that there had been no reports, the representative said that “Parents don’t want to rock the Boat” by reporting these incidents. I find that as an insult to parents, basically like telling them, “ You don’t care about your kids enough to report these things.”

I would encourage this board to hear statements from the OPS Constables that are assigned to schools as well as professionals in the field of Children’s Physiology who can provide better insight into how the police are essential in our schools. And how without them we would be contributing to building a society which is afraid of law enforcement and thus further endorsing the practice of taking matters into your own hands to solve problems which would require police intervention.

I should add, that I am not against the addition of social workers and trained mental health professionals in our schools, that would be a good thing, however not at the expense of the present and future health and safety of our students.