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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland Senate
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
For the Hearing on
Interaction with Law Enforcement Officers –
Development and Implementation of Curriculum Content
(SB 508)
February 14, 2018**

OPPOSE

Maryland PTA represents thousands of volunteer members and families in 900 public schools. For nearly 103 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Maryland PTA is comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization, Maryland PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 508, Interaction with Law Enforcement Officers – Development and Implementation of Curriculum Content. This bill requires, that by September 1, 2019, the Maryland State Board of Education develop curriculum content for inclusion within a required course for graduation, instruction related to proper interaction between individuals and law enforcement officers. Furthermore, on or before September 1 of the following year, each local board of education is required to implement the curriculum content in each high school in the county. While there are several merits of this bill, it poses multiple concerns that Maryland PTA deems harmful and borderline, punitive.

First, the fact that this curriculum is taking a back-door approach to add another requirement to graduate from high school is disconcerting. Creating more high school graduation requirements adds to the strain that some students already have to graduate. Furthermore, this bill makes getting a driver's license contingent on a successful passage on the driver's license examination that includes a demonstration of the proper actions to be taken by a driver during a traffic stop. Hence, the scope of educating students goes well beyond the high school classroom environment and has unintended consequences of penalizing drivers based on arguable actions that may be deemed valid or invalid based on who influences the curriculum.

Second, this bill is plagued with value and cultural norms that inherently discriminate. Exclusive focus on interaction with law enforcement renders the importance of interaction with other highly esteemed professionals such as teachers, clergy, physicians, professors or even other emergency personnel insignificant. Maryland PTA argues that all professions, people and parents in general, and educators specifically, deserve the same level of scrutiny and respect. Educators should be accorded high public esteem, reflecting the value that the community places on public education. However, this bill, as an endeavor to create public policy on how to interact with individuals of a certain profession, is too specific when the real issue is educating high school students on behaving according to societal norms (which includes civil disobedience), treating people with respect, valuing professions, understanding expectations, using the law as a form of protection and ultimately edifying relationships.

Third, while this bill proposes curriculum development with civil rights and civil liberties organizations, proper behavior or proper interaction fails to be defined, on the part of the student as well as the officer. In the midst of a slow-improving juvenile justice reform, insufficient incorporation of restorative practices within schools, inadequate identification of implicit bias training within police departments, publicly-perceived compromising standards of law enforcement and a pervasive lack of transparency and trust between certain communities and policing authorities, Maryland PTA believes this bill may aid in the blaming of the victim approach to educating.

Lastly, Maryland PTA appreciates the bill's attempt to address gaps in education that exists among students' knowledge in terms of being aware of citizens' rights, filing grievances and understanding complaint procedures, exercising due process and in general, knowing expected professional practices of law enforcement. Research has shown that students can benefit from personalized behavior modification plans as well. However, this bill, in its effort to address a bigger societal problem is void of students' voice. With an ever so changing landscape in education, students need to be at the table to ensure that expectations can be met and that their voices are heard. By promoting meaningful student involvement, schools can prepare students for a lifetime of significant participation in their communities and nation.

The Maryland PTA believes that the content curriculum of this bill is better suited as an elective course not tied to other facets of students' lives. And while the Police Training and Standards Commission, the Maryland State Board of Education and the Motor Vehicle Administration may receive information from any interested party in developing curriculum content as well as receive public comments, perhaps such instruction would be better offered as a summer course for high school credit or perhaps even offered at a camp inclusive with training for an active shooter event, restorative practices and cultural competency.

It is for these reasons that Maryland PTA strongly urges an **unfavorable vote** for Senate Bill 508.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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