

Comments submitted via the Public Comment email address

Date Range: July 8 – July 21, 2020

Good morning. I have been part of the Lewiston School System as an adult since 2008. I attended Lewiston schools throughout my childhood. When I heard that schools could be losing their SROs I was shocked. The kids we work with these days need all the positive influence they can get. Teachers need support and the SRO does just that, supports. You might think they are not needed, but where are the facts to prove this?

I'm not one to speak my mind publicly, but this topic really did something to me. The only memories I have of a student growing up are positive ones involving SROs. As a teacher I have witnessed SROs greeting kids with a smile, giving high fives, keeping our schools safe.

I understand there is a budget and you need to cut down on things, but eliminating SROs is not the answer. Returning to school after a pandemic - kids and adults are going to need all the support they can get. Please reconsider your decision in this matter.

Sincerely,

Hillary Poussard

Former Grade 3 teacher/New ELL teacher

McMahon Elementary

Hello,

Our son grew up going to school in Lewiston his whole school life. My wife and I believe that if the SRO was not in his school, we would not have our son here today. He was bullied so bad that that the D.A. at one point was involved. The officers was a comfortable place for him as well as many other students.

If the SRO was not involved when my son had to go to the hospital because of the assault we would not have found out what had happened. The school administration did their investigation and nothing was found and it was swept under the rug!

Our son has an interlectual disability as well as many others in the school. It's not only the kids with a disability that need the SRO's it's everyone.

It's very concerning that Portland decided to remove their SRO from schools. What's more bothersome is that one member wants to follow suit with them. Kiernan I. Majerus-Collins is trying to make a name for himself by doing this and for what reason I am not sure. I believe Kieran Majerus- Collins should resign.

Thank you for taking the time and reading my concerns.

Sincerely:

Andre Beaudoin

Hello,

I Support SRO's because they help to keep our children safe from harm in school! They help with bullying and physical violence!! They teach our children getting ready for middle school about drug abuse and the consequences from it! On top everything what if there was a violent person who entered our children's schools? And they locked down the school? Who would be there to de-escalate the situation? Our schools need police officers in them!!!! These SROs are a positive role model for our children other than their teachers!!!! I FEAR FOR OUR CHILDREN IF We stop funding for SROs!!!!

Thank you!!!!

Candace Jarvis

The "defund the police" movement is out of hand across the county. Why bring it to a Town like Lewiston? SRO's have been part of this community for years and have a proven track record! This shouldn't be an issue for any Maine city or town! Please stop wasting City time and resources on this matter!

Thank You

Dan Dumont

Owner

To whom it may concern,

As a 23 year Lewiston resident, and employee at a Lewiston hospital and the mother of a 5 year old, I hope you could strongly consider the value of the resource officer and DARE program.

Violent crime is on the rise in Lewiston, drug use and overdoses are on the rise. Sadly our youth are children often affected by substance use by parents or guardians that might have an addiction issue.

The DARE program offers them education they might not get at home. It's might be dated and need to be reinvented, but I'm confident this gives our children a great start in the dangers of drug use. As a nurse, I can tell you the overdose population sadly involves very young people.

Regarding the resource officer:

With increased violent crime in Lewiston, I don't feel safe as a parent sending my child to school without a resource officer. The violence on teachers and the magnitude of violent behavior at a certain school has decreased significantly since a resource officer is available. My phone doesn't ring at work daily because of bomb threats. It's scary to be at work to get message from the school about bomb threats. It's disturbing as a parent I have to explain to my child why the police are at school because a teacher and student were assaulted. I feel the resource officer offers a safe environment and often can resolve the issue before it escalates.

If you remove these resource offers, you the board members should be held accountable and have an assembly at the school. Don't hide behind your vote . Be brave and tell my child why you don't believe she deserves to be kept safe.

Thank you,
Brooke

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Marie and I was born and raised in Lewiston, Maine. I am writing to you today to encourage you to remove SROs from Lewiston Public Schools and put the funding toward school psychologists and social workers instead. The goal of every school environment should be to create a safe space where children are free from worries about hunger, physical safety, etc., and therefore able to concentrate on learning and achieving their full potential. Unfortunately, the current police system structure leaves many students feeling threatened by police and having them present in schools will infringe on these students' (who overwhelmingly are students of color) ability to feel safe and consequently to learn and develop into who they are meant to be. Psychologists and social workers, however, can help create the safe environment that all students need in order to thrive while also addressing the root cause of multiple reasons why police were originally placed in schools, for example, treating mental health issues before a student develops an addiction to drugs or alcohol and ends up bringing illicit substances to school. I ask you to look at this issue through a new lens, not one that says "We've always done it this way," but to look at it through the eyes of students who are themselves victims of police brutality or have a close friend/family member who is. Lewiston has been an exemplary leader when it comes to embracing diversity (LHS boys soccer team), so let's continue leading the pack by showing how schools can be safe for everyone without using police to achieve that standard, but by using psychologists and social workers instead.

Thank you,

Marie Schramke

I want to voice my opinion that I do not agree with the motion to try and remove SRO's from Lewiston Public Schools. Our children not only need the DARE program but also the positive relationships with Police Officers. I find it an absolute disgrace that this is even being considered. It is detrimental to the safety of our children in the present moment and their futures. SRO's bring forth a value that has no price tag and the education they provide lasts a lifetime.

Jennifer Jordan

I am not a Lewiston resident, I am a Lewiston teacher though. I have been at Farwell for 10 years now. During this time I have gotten to know Officer Ken Strout in his role as DARE officer. The relationships that Officer Strout has built with staff, students, and families are extremely positive. Students learn at a young age that police officers are not someone to

fear. Exposing our students to Lewiston's officers is extremely beneficial to their social/emotional needs.

I have witnessed our SROs handling students who are truly in crisis. They treat the students with such respect and kindness that just builds the relationships more. Those on the council who are pushing for the removal of our officers are making a terrible mistake. They are putting our students and teachers in a dangerous position.

My professional opinion as a special education teacher is that we need to keep our officers in our schools for the well being of all involved! I urge you to place your vote on the side of our students, schools, and police officers.

Thank You

Jacob Ballou

Self Contained Special Education Teacher Farwell

Crisis and Safety Team Member

I'm writing in support of the Lewiston SROs. I am not a Lewiston resident but I am a retired Lewiston school teacher. I taught Industrial Arts and later Technology Integration at Lewiston Middle School for 26 years before moving on to F.H. Harrison Middle School in Yarmouth, Maine where I completed my career in education with a total of 40 years of successful service.

When I look back at my years in Lewiston, I can think of five incidents where I needed and received assistance from our SRO. 1. Stranger hanging around in the stairwell. 2. On bus duty, a woman reported to me that a convicted sex offender had entered the building. I relayed the info to our SRO. 3. During lunch duty, four female students began physically fighting. Our SRO handled it while I kept the other students back. 4. During lunch duty, a stranger from off the street walked in and decided to have lunch with the students. 5. Overheard a student providing the details of his dad's plan to kill his mother to other students. Info. was handed over to the SRO.

Did I feel safe having an SRO in the building? Absolutely! The SROs that I worked with were an important part of the staff as they made good strong relationships with many of the students. I also felt welcome to drop in to the SRO's office just to chat. Our Lewiston SROs were friendly to all, polite and very professional. One year my advisee students did a penny drive for a child that was left as an orphan. It was a huge success and as a treat, Larry Brown, our SRO at the time, arranged for a few of my students and myself to take a ride in a police car down to the bank. There we had the coins counted and a check cut. It was a great experience.

In 2007 I left Lewiston Middle School to teach in a much smaller middle school in Yarmouth, Maine. Yarmouth is a very affluent community. They had no SRO as they felt one wasn't necessary. For a while, I kind of agreed with that thought but as time went on, especially my last few years in that community, I strongly felt that an SRO was necessary. Here's why. My principal sent around a memo to staff to "be on

the lookout for" a parent that had been released from prison for drug charges. He had no visitation rights for his two girls and was determined to see them. We were given a picture of him and told that if we see him in the school or on the playground to immediately dial 911. Later on we had another similar "be on the lookout" for a parent with no visitation rights that had been arrested for domestic abuse. Teachers are there to teach. Of course, it seemed that when in need there was no admin around to back up the teacher in such situations. The teachers are hired to provide engaging lessons and make positive relationships with the students.. Handling undesirables that suddenly appear within the school is not in their job description.

Parents may never say to their child's teachers, why don't you use my boat this weekend. Or why don't you use our camp at the ocean. No. Nor do teachers expect that. However, every day they don't think twice about trusting us with their child's care. A Lewiston principal once mentioned to me that he would put his life on the line to protect students and staff members. I think if you did a survey, 99% of the teaching staff would do the same. Students that are in our possession are our responsibility and we are going to protect them. Teachers and administrators should never have to worry that they may be called upon to handle such a situation during the school day. That's why I support the use of SROs in all school districts in our state. I was very disappointed with Portland's decision. I hope and encourage you to give this issue some very serious thought before making a final decision. Thank you for taking the time to read my message.

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Randy Dehetre

Retired School Teacher, RSU 67, RSU 2, Lewiston Public Schools, Yarmouth Schools

I am writing in response to the upcoming school committee vote that is taking place on July 13, 2020 regarding removing SROs from our elementary schools and eliminating the DARE program. The proposed plan would also eliminate one SRO position, which I have been told is being vacated due to a retirement. I do not believe that we should eliminate any position. SROs are very important, not only for our student's safety but our teacher's and staff's as well. I have 2 children enrolled at LHS, they are big supporters of the SRO. They have come home on numerous occasions telling us that they were very thankful that the SRO was there, that there had been some type of altercation and the SRO had broken it up. I have 4 children enrolled in public school, only two attend school in Lewiston. Two of them suffer from moderate to severe anxiety, and have had to have counseling because of anxiety about and around school shootings. WE NEED SROs!!!

My girls are athletes and not only are there members of LPD at the games to make sure everything stays peaceful, they also cheer the girls on. Roger Landry is a good example of a great officer. He not only helps coach at LHS, but he is always in the stands for his daughter's games. My 10 year old daughter became fast friends with him and loves to "run" into him anywhere in the community. He is a stand up member of the LPD and the community. I think that having SROs is a safety measure we cant afford to lose. Heaven forbid something terrible were to happen here, having a SRO would afford us precious seconds that we would not have if they were not in the building. Think about what is actually best for the students and staff and vote to keep the SROs in the schools!

Dear Lewiston Mr. Mayor, Lewiston City Council, and School Committee:

My name is Caleb Roebuck and I live in Ward 2 in Lewiston. I wanted to give my perspective to the SRO discussion as a resident and concerned citizen.

We have seen countless scenarios when SROs across the country have acted incredibly inappropriately towards children they are supposed to protect. They have acted violently towards or even arrested children as young as SIX (<https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/23/us/officer-arrested-children-6-8-suspended-orlando-trnd/index.html#:~:text=Last%20week%2C%20the%20officer%20arrested,a%20temper%20tantrum%20at%20school.&text=on%20Monday%20morning,-,The%20Lucious%20and%20Emma%20Nixon%20Academy%20said,no%20comment%20on%20the%20arrests.>)

It makes students nervous and afraid to see someone that could act out towards them and scar them for life. The same goes for DARE Officers. DARE began in the 1980s as part of the failed War on Drugs. Black people are incredibly disproportionately arrested for drug crimes, despite white people using drugs at the same rate. Multiple studies have shown DARE to be ineffective, and even that students who were exposed to DARE are more likely to do harmful drugs. It's a failed program that can and should be replaced. Drug prevention is incredibly important, but DARE fails to do so by failing to take into account local needs. In 2001, the US Surgeon General placed the program in the "ineffective primary prevention program". Nineteen years later...why are we still using it?

I'd like to ask the School Committee to consider the removal of the elementary school SRO and DARE officer. We can do WAY better for our children here without them.

Sincerely,

Caleb Roebuck

Hello,

Our son grew up going to school in Lewiston his whole school life. My wife and I believe that if the SRO was not in his school, we would not have our son here today. He was bullied so bad that that the D.A. at one point was involved. The officers was a comfortable place for him as well as many other students.

If the SRO was not involved when my son had to go to the hospital because of the assault we would not have found out what had happened. The school administration did their investigation and nothing was found and it was swept under the rug!

Our son has an interlectual disability as well as many others in the school. It's not only the kids with a disability that need the SRO's it's everyone.

It's very concerning that Portland decided to remove their SRO from schools. What's more bothersome is that one member wants to follow suit with them. Kiernan I. Majerus-Collins is trying to make a name for himself by doing this and for what reason I am not sure. I believe Kieran Majerus- Collins should resign.

Thank you for taking the time and reading my concerns.

Sincerely:

Andy Beaudoin

I am a Lewiston resident, taxpayer and voter. I am decisively in favor of keeping all SRO's in our schools.

I currently work every day at Val's Root Beer Drive-In with almost a dozen high school students, nine of whom attend Lewiston High School, and who have clearly made it known to me that they trust their resource officers, have positive interactions with them, are very appreciative to have them in their schools and DO NOT want to see them replaced with restorative justice coordinators.

If Committee member Majerus-Collins' proposal to eliminate one of the SRO's is adopted, a precedent will have been set and the elimination of other SRO's will most likely ensue.

Below is Mr. Majerus-Collins' statement to NewsCenter 6:

"I think it's particularly important in a community with so many students of color to really be attuned to what folks from our immigrant community, our Black and brown communities in Lewiston are saying. "What they're saying is what we're hearing all over the country. Folks are feeling over policed."

His statement is disturbing to me. It sounds as if he is trying to divide folks by the color of their skin. This proposal should not be about our 'Black and Brown community' but about the safety of all our children in our 'LEWISTON' community, regardless of their skin color.

Does he not realize that there are also MANY folks from our Lewiston community who might think that our city/schools are NOT over policed and do NOT want fewer SRO's in our city schools. The Officers' presence is reassuring to students that their schools are being kept safe for them and that they have someone who they can turn to, if needed, to listen to their concerns.

Would you please reconsider your vote if you are considering replacing our SRO's with restorative justice coordinators? Our SRO's compassionately teach all students how to become good citizens while keeping them safe from harm.

Regards

Gail Gregoire-Lawrence

To whom it may concern,

I am a resident of ward 7, I have three children, 2 of which have graduated, most recently at the Lewiston Auburn airport.

My children have not seen their biological father in 14 years, he is a very dangerous person that has tried to go into their school during their elementary years in another district. I cannot tell you the fear that lived in me wondering whether or not they would be safe at their school. Martel Elementary went beyond measure to make me feel safe as a parent. It is very important that we recognize not just the "cop" that is a persistent presence at our school. For me this was a primary factor, only second to the fact that my children have each developed relationships with their SRO. The SRO person that is in full support of the students' safety, their well-being, and overall support of our schools. They are the reason why I felt so at ease during my children's high school careers.

Let us not dwell on the negative social media and negative news going around at this time of pandemic crisis. It is very important that we reflect on what the positives are for support for our future prosperous community members.

The actual thought that an SRO is not important in our schools is totally preposterous. Whoever thought that this was a position fit for the chopping block needs to do some serious internal reflection. Maybe they never had the support of my children and I have had through the relationships with an SRO. Or maybe they never understood what the meaning of protection is to a single mother with youngsters that are trying to thrive in a community with a biological parent that has never paid child support to his children and to this very day is a menace to society by getting arrested frequently.

It is important for our children to have a meaningful, constant relationship by working with those whom are hired to protect and serve in our community.

Teresa Nash

MY NAME IS CHRIS LAWRENCE I AM A LEWISTON TAX PAYER. I work with 6 Lewiston high School students who all want an school resource officer. This School board member who came up with this proposal is ignorant. Safety of the students in this day and age is essential. Please do not abolish this position. Thank you

Earlier I sent in public comments about SROs and DARE officers in Lewiston schools, and I would like to amend those comments and make my views more clear:

I have had time to investigate the issue more, reflect, and speak with other Ward 2 constituents. With this further information, I do not approve of removing SROs from our schools immediately and completely.

Officer Strout has done a tremendous job, but unfortunately that is not a privilege afforded to students at other schools. I think the discussion should be about the SRO's duties in the school and how they are conducted. We can increase the importance of community policing to build trust and cooperation with the police and our students – we have seen this firsthand with Officer Phillipon's community

involvement. I believe this can be done with some minor changes such as changing the uniform of the officers to help students view them as someone who is there to help, not punish. I worked as a security guard and my uniform was police-style (I am definitely not trying to equate my time in that role to the duties of LEOs) and even that made people anxious. We were instructed not to go to certain places in the facility because of how uneasy it made people feel. If adults who had been part of the work force for years felt that way about a security guard, students seeing armed officers every day is worse. I also think that drug prevention is absolutely necessary to have in our school system. DARE as a program has been shown to be ineffective, especially when they don't take input from the school systems they are in. I believe we need to research a replacement program for DARE or allow the School Committee to set parameters for the DARE officer to work with to be most effective.

Thank you again for taking my comments.

Sincerely,

Caleb Roebuck