



Safer schools, safer kids...

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Testimony of Mo Canady, Executive Director, National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify on behalf of the National Association of School Resource Officers. It is my honor to serve as the Executive Director for this outstanding group of law enforcement and education professionals. NASRO is a not-for-profit association founded in 1991 with a solid commitment to our nation's youth. NASRO is comprised of school-based law enforcement officers, school administrators and school security and safety professionals working as partners to protect students, faculty and staff, and their school community. The "school resource officer," (SRO) also known as a "school safety liaison," or "school-based law enforcement officer," refers to commissioned law-enforcement officers selected, trained and assigned to protect and serve the education environment. I cannot emphasize enough how critical it is for officers to be *properly* selected and *properly* trained to function in the school environment. This is always a factor in the success or failure of the SRO program.

SRO programs can be traced back to the 1950's. Programs expanded slowly at first, then more quickly during the 1990s. For some school officials, this expansion was prompted by the 15 deadly, highly publicized campus rampages that occurred from 1993–1999. Other educators had equally compelling data in hand to influence the decision: their own campus incident reports and the perceptions of school personnel, students, and parents. Today, school resource officers have become a vital component in school safety planning. The SROs are seen as effective resources in reducing campus disruptions and in enhancing educators' and students' feelings of safety while at school.

The work of NASRO is to provide the highest quality of training to school-based law enforcement officers in order to promote safer schools and safer kids. The goal of NASRO is to provide safe learning environments in our nation's schools, provide valuable resources to school staff, foster a positive relationship with our nation's youth, and develop strategies to resolve problems affecting our youth with the objective of protecting every child so that they can reach their fullest potential.

I spent nearly half of my law enforcement career in school based-policing. It was without a doubt the most rewarding period of my career. It was more than just a job. It became my life's work. I developed positive relationships with administrators, faculty members, students and parents. I became an integral part of the Hoover City Schools District Crisis Team. By being a part of a school safety team, the SRO becomes fully engaged in crisis planning to include Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. SRO's can provide value to the written plans for a school district. They can also assist with campus site assessments as well as conducting safety drills.

The aspect of "Recovery" was not one that I had given a great deal of thought to during the early phase of my career in school-based law enforcement. It was not until the days following November 19, 2002 that it became clear to me the importance of the role that a school resource officer can play in the recovery portion of a critical incident. The unthinkable had happened at our largest high school. One student had taken the life of another in the hallway during the change of class periods. The faculty and staff did exactly what they were supposed to do, as they had been trained. The principal asked me to join him in a faculty/staff meeting after the students were able to be released. I took the opportunity to praise the staff for their good work. I did not realize it at the time, but this was actually the beginning of the recovery process. Plans were developed for the next day. We thought that our most important job on November 20th would be to keep this from happening again. To keep weapons out of the school. To make sure that no retaliation occurred. While all of those things were important, it paled in comparison to the need of the student body to be comforted and reassured. The need for trusted and caring adults became the more important issue in this recovery process. The school resource officers were certainly still focused on security but we were most definitely more engaged in the mental and emotional recovery process. The reason for this is because we were much more than just a law enforcement presence. We were trusted adults and we helped to make a difference in the lives of children during the days prior to and most definitely following November 19, 2002.

Trained and committed police officers are well-suited to effectively protect and serve the school community. School resource officers contribute by ensuring a safe and secure campus, educating students about law-related topics, and mentoring students as informal counselors and role models. Over the last 23 years, the National Association of School Resource Officers has become the world leader in school based policing. We have trained thousands of officers based on the Triad model of school based policing and these officers are having a positive impact on the lives of children every day.