



July 22, 2025

Mayor Ken Sim and  
Members of Vancouver City Council  
Vancouver City Hall  
453 West 12th Ave  
Vancouver, BC

*Re: Motion to Review School Liaison Officer (SLO) Program – Request to Defund/Suspend SLO Program Pending Evaluation*

Dear Mayor Sim and Councillors,

I am writing on behalf of the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) regarding the upcoming motion, "Request for Review of School Liaison Officer Program," to be considered at the July 23, 2025 meeting of the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services. We commend Councillor Fry and the Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee for bringing this motion forward.

As the Policy Director of an organization dedicated to protecting civil liberties and human rights, I urge you to use all jurisdictional and legal tools at your disposal to suspend the operation of the School Liaison Officer (SLO) program in Vancouver schools until an independent, third-party evaluation conclusively demonstrates that the program is not harmful to students. The BCCLA has long opposed the presence of police in schools, as we have serious concerns that SLO programs pose significant harms and rights violations for young people, especially Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized students.

**Suspend the SLO Program to Prioritize Human Rights and Evidence-Based Decision-Making while Saving Public Funds**

Our position is grounded not only in principles of human rights and equality, but also in a growing body of evidence – both local and international – indicating that embedding police officers in schools does more harm than good. We believe that schools should be safe and inclusive environments for all students, and any program that potentially undermines that environment must be paused and rigorously scrutinized. Below, we

outline key evidence and considerations that underscore the need for a precautionary suspension of the SLO program:

### **1. No Demonstrated Safety Benefit, but Evidence of Harm**

Multiple studies have found that school policing does not measurably improve safety and often leads to increased student suspensions and arrests for minor infractions. The presence of officers tends to escalate disciplinary responses rather than prevent serious incidents. In short, SLO programs may do more harm than good, especially for youth development and academic success.

### **2. Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Students**

Police in schools disproportionately harm Indigenous, Black, and other racialized students, as well as students with disabilities. These students report feeling less safe and more surveilled in the presence of officers. The motion before you cites the 2021 Vancouver School Board survey that found that 60% of Black students and 33% of Indigenous students felt the SLO program did not contribute to school safety.

### **3. Expert Guidance Against Police-in-Schools**

The BC Human Rights Commissioner has recommended that SLO programs should not operate unless and until there is empirical evidence that they do not cause harm and are necessary. In the absence of such evidence, a rights-based approach requires their suspension.<sup>1</sup>

### **4. Community Support for Alternatives**

Parents, educators, and students in Vancouver have previously called for the removal of the SLO program, a move that was supported by both the Vancouver Elementary and Secondary Teachers' Associations and the Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council.

Vancouver should be proud that in 2021 it was at the forefront of this movement, responding to community feedback and evidence by discontinuing the SLO program. It is concerning that, despite no new evidence of benefit, the program has since been reintroduced in a modified form. We note that the current iteration involves officers in less official uniforms and with concealed weapons.

While these changes were perhaps well-intentioned, they do not address the fundamental issue: a police officer in school – uniformed or not – still represents law enforcement presence. The core power dynamics and potential for harm remain, as does the mistrust from communities who have historically felt over-policed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Govender, Kasari. B.C. Human Rights Commissioner – Letter to BC School Trustees Association re: School Liaison Officers (Nov. 25, 2022), available online: <https://bchumanrights.ca/news-and-events/news/letter-to-school-trustees-on-use-of-school-liaison-officers/>

## **Opportunity to Promote Racial Justice and Equity in Vancouver**

In fact, reintroducing police to schools without a fresh, thorough review (as has occurred) has reignited community concerns and eroded trust that their voices are being heard. We were frustrated and disappointed to see how members of the Vancouver Police Board's African Descent Committee's concerns about the SLO program were completely dismissed when they appeared as a delegation at the June 2023 Police Board Meeting, resulting in a severe relationship breakdown and a public apology from the Vancouver Police Board 14 months later.<sup>2</sup>

We urge you as members of the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services not to follow suit, and to seriously consider the outstanding safety concerns that have motivated the City's Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee to ask for an independent review.

In light of the above points, the BCCLA asks you to go one step further and to take the only prudent and responsible course of action: to suspend the School Liaison Officer program immediately and maintain that suspension unless a rigorous third-party evaluation (one with expertise in equity and policing, as the motion suggests) emerges.

## **City Council Controls Budget for School Liaison Officer Programme**

We recognize that jurisdictionally, the Vancouver School Board (VSB) oversees school programs, and the Vancouver Police Board oversees policing policies. However, the legal authority to approve and fund the operational budget for the VPD - including the budget required for the school liaison officer program in Vancouver schools - rests with you as council and mayor.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of any compelling evidence about the value of the SLO program, you each have both a democratic and ethical obligation not to approve such funding.

The motion before you itself is an example of Council leveraging its voice to advocate for students. We ask that you use this voice as strongly as possible: endorse the call for an independent review, and also formally advise that the SLO program be paused on the grounds of protecting student safety and human rights until that review is complete and affirmatively finds the program to be beneficial. In practical terms, this could mean requesting that the Vancouver Police Department withdraw its officers from the SLO duty for the upcoming school term, and reallocating those resources to proven, non-police interventions for youth. It could mean working with the School Board to implement alternative safety and support measures – more counsellors, youth workers,

---

<sup>2</sup> Vancouver Police Board, Letter of Apology to Ms. Kuehn and members of the African Descent VPD Advisory Committee (August 20, 2024), available online: <https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/vancouver-police-board-statement-letter-of-apology/>

<sup>3</sup> Police Act, [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 367, section 27.

Indigenous liaisons, and mental health resources – in place of police. These kinds of civilian alternatives can address safety and wellbeing in schools without the downsides that come with policing.

## **Summary**

The BC Civil Liberties Association is committed to working collaboratively to ensure schools remain safe havens for learning and growth. We absolutely share the goal of protecting students and preventing violence or bullying in schools. Our contention is that there are more effective and less harmful ways to achieve that goal than having police officers with weapons roaming the school halls. We urge the City of Vancouver to prioritize approaches that build trust and support for students rather than those that instill fear or disproportionately criminalize them.

By suspending the SLO program pending a full evidence-based evaluation, Council would be taking a courageous and principled stand for the rights and wellbeing of children and youth in our city. It would send a message that Vancouver bases its public safety strategies on data, human rights principles, and the voices of the community – especially those most impacted.

In closing, we respectfully ask you to support and strengthen the July 23 motion by formally requesting an immediate suspension of the School Liaison Officer program. This suspension should remain in effect unless and until an impartial review demonstrates that the program poses no harm to our students and is truly needed. Anything less would be to gamble with the safety and futures of the young people under your care.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can provide further information, research, or support on this matter. We appreciate your consideration and your commitment to a Vancouver where every student can thrive in a safe, equitable learning environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. McDermott', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Meghan McDermott, Policy Director