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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 917

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 917, which will improve school safety through more effective campus policing, save school districts valuable security funding, and ensure fewer youth are placed into the 'school-to-prison pipeline' for misbehavior at school.

OFFICERS WORKING IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS SHOULD RECEIVE SPECIALIZED TRAINING

School district peace officers and school resource officers face far different challenges than officers who protect our streets, and these officers need specialized training to work effectively with kids in an educational environment. A lack of specialized training for these officers is likely contributing to the over-criminalization of children's misbehavior in school, which in turn is driving a drop-out crisis in Texas.

KEY FINDING

- **The increasing use of officers to respond to misbehavior in schools – and the lack of specialized training for these officers – corresponds with a dramatic rise in misdemeanor citations issued to kids in Texas schools.** In 1978, only one percent of Texas schools reported having police present; now, most Texas schools report police presence from a local law enforcement agency or from the school district's own police department. While the police presence has increased in Texas schools, the use of Class C misdemeanor tickets in Texas schools has also increased dramatically.¹ This over-criminalization of student misbehavior is likely contributing significantly to the drop-out crisis in Texas.²

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 917 BY REPRESENTATIVE WALLE

- ***H.B. 917 will improve school safety through more effective campus policing.*** Under this bill, the training curriculum for school district peace officers will include such areas as child development, special needs, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques. Undergoing this supplementary training will enable school district peace officers to more appropriately respond to the developmental and physical differences between youth and adults – matching tactics to the unique environment and vulnerable population with whom they interact – as well as mete out appropriate penalties for on-campus offenses. This specialized training is critical in defining officers' appropriate role in the educational environment.
- ***H.B. 917 can save school districts valuable security funds.*** At a time when school districts are facing significant budget constraints, they are also spending an increasing share of their budgets on school-based law enforcement. Better-trained peace officers will enhance the quality of school-based policing, allowing savings to be redirected to other education priorities, such as teacher retention.
- ***H.B. 917 does not place an extra financial burden on school districts.*** The specialized training requirement would not present extra costs to school districts, as peace officers are already required to complete training hours to maintain their licensure. The requirements of H.B. 917 fit within existing training as required for licensed officers.

¹ Texas Appleseed "Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline: Ticketing, Arrest & Use of Force in Schools" (2010).

² Council of State Governments "Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement" (2011).