



## Press Release

*August 16, 2020*

### Arkansas Justice Reform Coalition v. City of Fayetteville

A lawsuit on behalf of AJRC was filed August 14, 2020<sup>1</sup> based on FPD arrest data.<sup>2</sup>

The local debate about policing in schools has coalesced around the funding vote for two new SROs for Fayetteville Public Schools. The positions would be partially paid for by federal money. More than half of the positions would require contributions from the City and Fayetteville Public Schools, and the grant would only subsidize the positions for five years. From the year 2000 to 2020, Fayetteville population increased by 48 percent while the police budget increased by 162 percent now at \$17mm yearly.

This lawsuit holds the Fayetteville City Council accountable to the democratic process. There has been a vote by elected city council members on the issue, and after debate, and amendment, and public comment the motion to accept the grant failed. Democracy worked. The new motion is an end-around of the democratic process. It is also distracting when we should be focused on the safety of children in schools and how to facilitate learning during the ongoing pandemic instead of re-debating subsidies for law enforcement.

AJRC's legal challenge, hopefully, encourages decision makers to consider all the effects of SROs on students and families—often students who are non-white, low-income, and special needs. The Fayetteville arrest data shows there is no local exceptionalism. These systemic problems affect Fayetteville Public Schools.

AJRC's Complaint points out national and local data that shows strong evidence that on-site law enforcement criminalizes normal childhood behavior. Our Complaint also highlights research that describes better approaches, **and** highlights studies showing there is an SRO lobby that pushes SRO placements as the fastest growing area of law enforcement. Advocates of school choice promote charter schools that extract money and students from the public school system by using public school arrest data—that increases when SROs are present—to advertise school choice and charter schools.

Data from the Fayetteville police department shows that most arrests are initiated by school officials and SROs, not family or student complaints. Students of color are more likely to be arrested and re-arrested by SROs for activity that takes place on campus. Although few students are referred to the juvenile court system, many students face school discipline and even expulsion, at all age groups, from their arrest. This excludes disadvantaged children from learning and creates economic and social stress for families. According to FPD data, the students and families affected are often the most vulnerable in our community.

The research on this issue is vast and consistent. SROs create a lockdown learning environment. AJRC, as a community organization, brings this legal challenge on behalf of all Fayetteville citizens, and families with children in the Fayetteville Public School system. Our desire is for a safe, diverse, and uplifting learning environment for all children. We support equal justice and equal learning opportunities for all students.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://t.ly/i0mH>

<sup>2</sup> <https://t.ly/RnaN>