

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20510

October 29, 2020

The Honorable Jim Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Inhofe and Smith and Ranking Members Reed and Thornberry:

As you work to finalize the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we write to request that you include our amendment to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on the school-to-prison pipeline.

In pushing students out of schools and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems, the school-to-prison pipeline denies students an education, limits future employment opportunities, and creates significant challenges to full participation in society. These costs fall disproportionately on students who already face barriers to education such as students of color and students with disabilities. In particular, Black students represent 31% of all school-related arrests and are three-times more likely to be suspended and expelled compared to white students.

Unfortunately, the school-to-prison pipeline is the direct consequence of specific trends in our education systems. When schools adopted zero tolerance policies that required certain responses to behaviors, minor and often subjective transgressions like tardiness or willful defiance, became grounds to suspend or expel a student. Zero tolerance policies coupled with chronically underfunded schools, persistent school segregation, racial discrimination, and the increased use of surveillance and police officers have created negative learning environments in our schools.

Congress can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. If enacted, this amendment can help raise awareness and improve our approach to school safety and student wellbeing through evidence-based interventions such as restorative practices. A Government Accountability Office study on the school-to-prison pipeline will help highlight the extent of the issue and provide states with data on how evidence-based interventions can be more effective, improve student achievement, and enhance student well-being and public safety. We encourage you to use this opportunity in the FY21 NDAA to help stop the school-to-prison pipeline and preserve students' opportunities to learn.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michael F. Bennet in blue ink.

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Steve Cohen in blue ink.

Steve Cohen
United States Representative

CC: Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
House Committee on Education and Labor