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ENSURE SCHOOL POLICE OFFICERS HAVE SPECIALIZED, YOUTH-FOCUSED SKILLS TO INCREASE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO INCIDENTS AT SCHOOLS

PROBLEM

Current law grants Texas school district officials broad direction to determine if and how peace officers are deployed on their campuses. Many schools have hired untrained police officers and security personnel, and, as a result, they have seen a hike in school ticketing and arrests for nonviolent violations of the school's code of conduct.¹

KEY FINDINGS

- Overzealous campus discipline has led to the unnecessary criminalization of minor student misbehavior. The vast majority of students arrested on campus commit nonviolent and vague offenses, such as “disruption of class” or “disorderly conduct.”²
- Not only do increased arrests pose long-term problems for students with records, but they clog court dockets and detention facilities with nonviolent youth who would be better served through less costly alternatives.

SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 348 BY REPRESENTATIVE WALLE

H.B. 348 requires that law enforcement officers, before being eligible to serve as school district peace officers for more than 30 days, must complete 16 hours of specialized education and training either from TCLEOSE, the Bexar County children's crisis intervention training program, or the Texas School Safety Center at Texas State University.

- ***H.B. 348 will improve school safety through more effective campus policing.*** The training curriculum for peace officers will include such areas as child development, children with special needs, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques. Undergoing this supplementary training will enable school district peace officers to more appropriately address the obvious 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. Ultimately, this specialized training is critical in defining officers' appropriate role in the educational environment.
- ***H.B. 348 can save school districts' valuable security spending funds.*** At a time when school districts are being forced to cut teachers due to budget constraints, they are also spending an increasing share of their budgets on school-based law enforcement (between \$2 million and \$20 million per year). Better-trained and efficient peace officers will enhance the quality of school-based policing, thereby necessitating fewer peace officers, and allowing the savings to be redirected elsewhere, such as teacher retention.
- ***H.B. 348 does not pose an extra financial burden on 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. Specifically, peace officers must currently complete at least 40 hours of training every 2 years. As such, this requirement easily fits within existing training hours as required for licensed officers.

¹ Texas Appleseed, “Texas’ School-to-Prison Pipeline: Ticketing, Arrest & Use of Force in Schools,” December 2010, pgs. 4, 5.

² *Ibid.*, pg. 68