

Statement of Don Hulin
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“Proactively Protecting Our Schools”
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Thank you for allowing me to share my personal perspective as to the merits of School Resource Officers (SROs). Parents/guardians personally entrust me to provide their child with a safe and secure educational environment from the moment their child enters our facilities, until the time they arrive safely at home. This is a daunting task for any school administrator, and one I don't take lightly. School safety is the one concern that keeps me awake at night. I personally believe that Hoover High SROs are the most critical component to ensuring the safest school environment possible for the 3000 students, over 300 faculty/staff members and visitors daily on my campus. Our SROs' main goal is providing the safety and security of every person on campus. Being Principal of Alabama's largest and most diverse high school the past ten years, one that is served and protected by trained professional School Resource Officers, has strengthened my resolve that SROs need to be not only in my school, but in all schools.

During my career, I have worked in schools having no SROs. Schools ranging from very large high schools in Louisiana, to a small K-12 rural Alabama school. Most of those schools had very limited protective measures in place such as metal detectors, camera/surveillance systems and other safety components. Others had none and sadly all had no SRO. In reflection, those schools were much more vulnerable to a major safety event by not having trained school resource officers on campus. I am incredibly fortunate to have four SROs full time on my two campuses. I wish I had more! We recently increased the number of SROs on campus from three to four after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Florida. After the shooting, a detailed review by our SROs and administrative team identified gaps in our campus security plan. Our SROs took the lead in the safety review and implementation of needed fixes.

Hoover High School Resource Officers are assigned numerous tasks other than providing a safe school environment, they do so much more. They take the lead in the planning, development, implementation, practice and constant evolution of our school Safety and Crisis Management Plan. As mentioned, they immediately reviewed our security plan after the Florida shooting. They suggested solutions, one being improving response time to a critical event by having an additional officer on campus. Response time is critical to crisis management and the amount of collateral damage a school intruder can inflict. It is important to understand that I am not a trained safety and crisis management professional, nor is anyone on my faculty and staff. We are trained educators. Our officers have gone through a rigorous training process prior to them being assigned to our school. They continue to train current best practices. I am fortunate that one of my officers is currently a Firearms Instructor, Active Shooter Instructor and Bomb

Technician. All of my officers are part of the SRT team (Special Response Team). Their professional expertise is critical during a school safety crisis.

I value our SROs' professional experiences and knowledge in guiding me and my administrative team in providing that all-encompassing safety plan for our school. This is not an easy task. My school facility blueprint consists of a main building, an annex building and numerous outdoor academic and extracurricular venues. The three story main building alone has 110 exterior glass doors. Like most older schools, mine was not built with school safety in mind. In 1994, Hoover High was designed to move over 3000 students and staff efficiently every 50 minutes. My SROs not only guide us through safety best practices inside those buildings, but also in outdoor areas of concern. The arrival, dismissal and after school logistics are very concerning safety areas for discussion. From our parking lots, to student drop off areas, to bus arrival and dismissal zones (24 buses), to outdoor athletic events, SROs provide us with the best safety options through their insight. Those areas are extremely vulnerable because of the amount of students and visitors on an open campus. Student travel coverage to and from events is also very important. Our athletic and academic teams travel to local, state and national competitions very frequently. SROs are assigned to travel with those teams. It provides me and our parents with a sense of protectiveness for our kids.

SROs most importantly develop relationships based on trust with our students and additionally with our staff and community. Most people are naturally apprehensive of police. SROs work extremely hard to make our kids feel comfortable around police officers. They accomplish this by talking/communicating with our kids on a variety of topics. Simply just saying good morning goes a long way in relationship building with our students. Our kids view the SROs as just a person talking to them, not a cop. SROs provide advice and will personally refer kids to the appropriate counselor if needed. Kids will always remember and respect the person that took the time to help them in a school. In turn, a school culture of trust and ownership grows within our school. Building those relationships provides our school a means to constantly check the pulse of the school and community as it relates to school safety. It allows us to be proactive in the recognition of that troubled student, of the issues within a home and related safety problems in our community. My SROs lead that charge, making it much easier to deal with potential flashpoints of violence before they one day spill into my school.

SROs are true examples of a positive, professional, and caring police officer for our kids and stakeholders. Something our kids need to experience in person and not only through visuals we all see in news reporting or social media. My lead SRO commented on the misperceptions of their duties. He said, "arresting kids is not our number one goal like some think. The greatest tool we have as police is discretion. Our job is not to arrest kids but to protect and help them and the school administration in any way possible."

Finally, I had some very tough conversations with some of my students after the Parkland shooting. They were scared. They wanted me to assure them that our school was safe. They asked, could a shooting like that happen at our school? Will you and the SROs protect us?

Difficult questions for me to answer. I didn't sugar coat my answer to the school safety questions. I can't guarantee a perfectly safe school. In my opinion none exist. What surprised me the most though at the end of all those tough conversations was what every kid wanted at Hoover High School. Every single one of them wanted it to be safe place, but they also didn't want it to feel like a prison. Tough job!! I can't imagine trying to find that happy median for our kids and school without the help of my SROs.

I hope my testimony gives you an idea of how important it is for me to have our SROs leading our school safety efforts. They are invaluable to me as Principal of Hoover High School. I truly appreciate the opportunity to be before you today. I hope in some small way this will help you in understanding the key role SROs play in providing a safe school environment not only for my school, but in every school.