

Summary of AB 68 (Essayli) – School Safety: Armed School Resource Officers

AB 68 proposes that all school districts and charter schools in California be required to have at least one **armed school resource officer (SRO)** on campus during regular school hours and any other time students are present. The implementation will be phased in as follows:

- **2026:** High schools (grades 9-12)
- **2027:** Middle schools (grades 6-8)
- **2028:** Elementary schools (grades K-5)

This requirement applies to schools with **50 or more students** and is considered a **state-mandated local program**, meaning school districts will be reimbursed for the costs incurred. The bill defines a **school resource officer** as a **peace officer authorized to carry a loaded firearm** and either employed by or contracted to the school district or charter school.

Impact on Black Children

AB 68 could have significant consequences for Black students, both in terms of school safety and the broader implications of increased policing in educational settings. Below are key considerations:

1. Increased Police Presence and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Research shows that Black students are disproportionately disciplined and criminalized in schools with high law enforcement presence. **Black boys, in particular, are more likely to be suspended, expelled, and arrested at school compared to their peers.**
- Armed SROs may contribute to **higher rates of student-police interactions**, increasing the risk of **criminalizing normal adolescent behavior** rather than addressing disciplinary issues through restorative or supportive measures.
- Given existing racial biases in policing, **Black children may experience heightened surveillance and harsher disciplinary outcomes** under this policy.

2. Potential Psychological Impact

- The presence of **armed officers in schools can create an environment of fear** rather than safety, particularly for Black students who already experience disproportionate interactions with law enforcement in broader society.
- **Increased anxiety and stress** from heightened policing could negatively affect academic performance, school engagement, and mental health.

3. Alternative Safety Measures Overlooked

- The bill focuses on **armed enforcement** rather than **preventative safety measures**, such as **mental health resources, conflict resolution programs, and restorative justice initiatives**.
- Black children often benefit more from **trauma-informed counseling, culturally competent staff, and community-based interventions** rather than the **presence of armed law enforcement officers in their learning spaces**.

4. Financial Implications and Resource Allocation

- The bill mandates reimbursement for costs, but **it does not guarantee that funds will not be redirected from existing student support services** (e.g., counseling, mentorship programs, and extracurricular activities).
- Historically, Black students thrive in schools that prioritize **holistic support systems** over **punitive discipline and surveillance**.

Analysis and Policy Considerations

While the intent of AB 68 is to **enhance school safety**, its approach may inadvertently **harm Black students by reinforcing the criminalization of youth in educational settings**. Instead of focusing on armed officers, lawmakers could:

1. **Invest in mental health professionals, counselors, and school-based social workers** trained in de-escalation techniques and culturally responsive practices.
2. **Expand restorative justice programs** that address conflicts through dialogue rather than punishment.
3. **Engage community stakeholders, including Black parents, students, and educators**, to develop school safety solutions that do not rely on an increased police presence.
4. **Examine data on existing SRO programs** to ensure that law enforcement on campus does not disproportionately impact Black and other marginalized students.

Conclusion: AB 68 could have unintended negative consequences for Black children by reinforcing policing in schools rather than investing in more effective and equitable solutions. A holistic approach to school safety—one that prioritizes **student support services and community engagement** over increased law enforcement—would be more beneficial in ensuring safe and thriving school environments for all students.

Pros and Cons of AB 68

Pros (Supporters' Arguments)

✓ Enhanced School Security

- Proponents argue that having armed officers on campus **deters potential school shootings and violent incidents.**
- Immediate **law enforcement response** in the event of an emergency could prevent or mitigate harm.

✓ Standardized Safety Measures Across Schools

- The bill ensures **uniform safety protocols** in all schools, regardless of location or funding.
- Reduces **disparities in security resources** between affluent and underfunded schools.

✓ Potential to Strengthen Relationships Between Police & Students

- Some believe SROs could **build trust with students** and serve as mentors, fostering a sense of safety.
- Officers may be able to intervene early **in cases of bullying, gang recruitment, or potential threats.**

✓ State Funding Ensures Schools Don't Bear the Costs

- Since the bill mandates state reimbursement, it does not divert school funds from **academic or mental health programs.**

Cons (Opposition Arguments)

✗ Increased Criminalization of Black Students

- **Black students are disproportionately targeted for discipline and arrests,** even for minor infractions like talking back or dress code violations.
- Schools with a strong police presence often see **increased arrests and suspensions** rather than improved safety.

✗ Contributes to the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Instead of **addressing behavioral issues through counseling or intervention,** students are more likely to face law enforcement consequences.

- Black students are already 3x **more likely to be arrested at school than White students** for similar behaviors.

✗ **Lack of Evidence That Armed Officers Prevent School Shootings**

- Studies show **armed officers rarely prevent or stop mass shootings.**
- In Parkland (2018) and Uvalde (2022), **officers were present but failed to stop the attacks.**

✗ **Negative Psychological Impact on Students**

- Some students, especially those from marginalized communities, may feel **intimidated, stressed, or unsafe** in heavily policed environments.
- Presence of officers may create **an oppressive atmosphere** rather than a supportive one.

✗ **Alternative Safety Measures Are Overlooked**

- Research supports **mental health support, restorative justice, and conflict resolution** as more effective means of improving school safety.
- Critics argue that **funding should go toward social workers, counselors, and de-escalation training instead of more policing.**

Fictional List of Supporters & Opponents of AB 68

Potential Supporters of AB 68

1. **Assemblymember Bill Essayli (Author of the Bill)** – Advocating for stronger security in schools to **prevent mass shootings.**
2. **California Association of School Resource Officers** – Supports the bill as it **expands employment opportunities for SROs.**
3. **National Rifle Association (NRA)** – Likely to support the bill as it reinforces **armed defense in schools.**
4. **California School Boards Association (Conditional Support)** – May back the bill if **funding is guaranteed** and does not impact school budgets.
5. **Parents for Safe Schools Coalition** – Some parents support **armed protection for their children.**
6. **Law Enforcement Associations** – Police organizations may view this as **a way to expand their presence and authority in schools.**

Potential Opponents of AB 68

1. **California Legislative Black Caucus** – Concerned about the **criminalization of Black youth** and racial disparities in school discipline.

2. **ACLU of California** – Argues that the bill **exacerbates the school-to-prison pipeline** and prioritizes policing over education.
 3. **Teachers' Unions (California Teachers Association)** – May oppose the bill **due to concerns about student well-being and alternative safety solutions**.
 4. **Restorative Justice Advocates** – Push for **mental health support and peer mediation** rather than policing.
 5. **Students' Rights Organizations** – Groups like **Black Lives Matter in Schools** argue that **more officers lead to greater racial disparities**.
 6. **Mental Health Professionals** – Concerned that **policing students instead of supporting their mental health is counterproductive**.
 7. **Black Youth Leadership Project**
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Final Analysis

AB 68 reflects a **law enforcement-first approach** to school safety, which has historically harmed **Black students and students of color**. While the bill **claims to enhance security**, research suggests it may instead:

1. **Increase racial disparities** in school discipline.
2. **Fail to prevent school shootings**, as armed officers have not proven to be an effective deterrent.
3. **Divert focus from alternative safety measures** like mental health support, trauma-informed care, and conflict resolution.

For **Black students**, the consequences could be profound—**more police encounters, more arrests, and more barriers to academic success**. Policymakers must consider **evidence-based approaches to safety** that prioritize student well-being rather than **mandating more armed officers in schools**.