



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

January 18, 2024

PUBLIC TESTIMONY RE: ACPS FY 2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

Good evening. My name is Laura Petty. I am an attorney at the Advancement Project, a national racial justice organization that has for 25 years pioneered efforts to end the school-to-prison pipeline. We partner with the young people at Tenants and Workers United to fight for schools that are safe from the threat of police violence and equipped with the resources necessary to ensure that all students can thrive.

We are disappointed to see that the proposed budget for 2025 cuts almost all support staff who were brought on with ESSER funds—including six counselors, two psychologists, and one social worker—and at the same time increases expenditures on security services—including the new weapons screeners—for the third year in a row. This budget is a moral document; it shows us that ACPS prioritizes police surveillance tactics over the needs of its Black and Latine students. And ACPS has told us as much, as it has removed restorative practices and socio-emotional supports for students from its 2025 priorities.

ACPS already underfunds the holistic supports and restorative practices that students need, even though TWU has repeatedly called for ACPS to prioritize students' mental health and non-punitive and restorative approaches to discipline, measures that, when implemented fully and effectively over the long-term, actually make schools safe.¹

We reiterate that it is the services that ACPS proposes to cut that really make young people feel safe and secure. By contrast, these “weapons screeners”—metal detectors by another name—are unproven and ineffective. Indeed, Evolv, the company that ACPS has contracted with for these screeners, has faced scrutiny for its products' inaccuracy² and is currently being investigated by the FTC for misleading marketing materials.³ ACPS has not shared how much money it has already spent on the screeners, nor has it shared its contract with Evolv so that the public can understand why the “safety and security” budget has increased each year for the past three years.

¹ THELTON HENDERSON, SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, SCHOOL OF LAW (2010), https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/thcsj/10-2010_School-based_Restorative_Justice_As_an_Alternative_to_Zero-Tolerance_Policies.pdf.

² See Mark Keierleber, *The Latest School 'Weapons Detection' Tech Can Miss Serious Threats, Experts Say*, 74 MILLION (Jan. 30, 2023), <https://www.the74million.org/article/the-latest-school-weapons-detection-tech-can-miss-serious-threats-experts-say/>.

³ See Martha Dalton, *Security Firm Used by Atlanta Schools Under Investigation*, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION (Oct. 27, 2023), <https://www.govtech.com/education/k-12/security-firm-used-by-atlanta-schools-under-investigation>.



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Instead of continuing to invest in harmful surveillance technologies, we call on ACPS to robustly fund the restorative practices program—for which the proposed budget only provides one full-time staff member—so that it can actually be implemented in a meaningful way, and to provide for *more* counselors, psychologists, and social workers, not fewer, because current staffing levels are not meeting the needs of ACPS’s 16,000 students. We also uplift TWU’s demand for robust and transparent data sharing so that ACPS’s discipline and support practices can be studied for effectiveness and truly accountable to the public.

We know that ACPS schools are not safe places for many Black and Latine young people, who face disproportionate school suspensions and policing. We therefore call on ACPS to do the hard, long-term work of transforming school culture to one that supports students, builds trusting relationships, and repairs harms—elements of true safety—instead of reverting to short-term gimmicks.

Thank you.