



# FAQ: Shifting police funding to student needs

## 1. Why is UTLA talking about eliminating the school police?

The problems of overpolicing and racism do not end at our school gates. LAUSD has the largest school police force in the United States, and even though only 8% of the LAUSD population is Black, Black students account for 25% of all LAUSD School Police arrests.

The use of random searches, pepper spray, and other aggressive tactics criminalize and have long-lasting impacts on our students. 25% of LAUSD School Police arrests are of elementary and middle school students. Research shows that having police in schools has a negative impact on student learning and makes kids feel unsafe (find links to studies from the ACLU, Harvard, and UCLA in our FAQ at [bit.ly/UTLARacialJustice](http://bit.ly/UTLARacialJustice)). Behaviors that should be addressed within the school community are instead outsourced to police, and such infractions create a record that follows a young person and limits the scope of their opportunities.

We should be investing in student needs. The LASPD's \$70 million budget would pay for 600 counselors, PSWs, or PSAs.

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## 2. What is happening with UTLA calling for the elimination of the LAUSD School Police?

The UTLA Board of Directors overwhelmingly endorsed a call to eliminate the LA School Police budget and redirect those funds into the expansion of Community Schools, especially in schools with higher numbers of Black students, and supports for students such as psychiatric social workers, pupil services and attendance counselors, school counselors, nurses, and other crucial direct student services. This will be discussed at the June 17 Area meeting and must be voted on by the House of Representatives before becoming UTLA policy.

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## 3. Why call for the elimination of the school police instead of defunding it?

The regular presence of officers in hallways has a profound impact on students of color who, according to multiple analyses and studies, are more likely to be harshly punished for ordinary misbehavior. By calling for the elimination of funding, the UTLA Board is saying that police have no place on campus, joining a push in Oakland, Denver, Portland, Minneapolis, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and many other cities.

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## 4. Currently, some schools partner with LASPD, and these programs have resulted in a decline in calling the LAPD and the LA County Sheriff's Department. If this program is eliminated, won't calls to LAPD and the sheriff increase?

First, it is important to be clear that school police are just as much "police" as LAPD or sheriffs. They have the same training, culture, and mandates. More importantly, they approach potentially volatile situations with the same mindset of dominance and repression that has proven to be a failure, particularly in schools, over and over. PSWs have their own training and mandates and may not be the most appropriate to intervene in every situation. That is why we need a "restorative culture team," including other trained professionals like gang intervention workers, peacekeepers, peer mediators/counselors, and so on – folks who are skilled in de-escalation and harm reduction, and more importantly, already have the trust and respect of students. Given our current climate, a police officer is much more likely to make a volatile situation even more dangerous for everyone.

## **5. LASPD is another union. Shouldn't we be united with our union brothers and sisters?**

The School Police Union – like the Fraternal Order of Police – is not a union. The role of police has always been to protect managers and property. They cross picket lines and break up strikes.

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## **6. What is UTLA doing to support the struggle for Black lives?**

- The UTLA House of Representatives previously endorsed Black Lives Matter LA's demands in light of COVID-19 and rates of Black death, including divesting from police funding. These demands include both immediate demands meant for emergency implementation during the coronavirus crisis, and long-term demands. Read the full demands at [www.blmla.org](http://www.blmla.org).
  - UTLA joined with more than 20 community, labor, policy, and academic organizations to endorse immediate "first step" demands to combat anti-Black racism and address policing, including around stopping the armed occupation of neighborhoods, launching an investigation of excessive use of force by LAPD at peaceful protests, reducing spending on the police, investing money in overpoliced, high-needs communities, and exploring alternatives to policing to keep the public safe. Read the letter at [bit.ly/let2garcetti](http://bit.ly/let2garcetti).
  - The UTLA Board of Directors, in line with movements in cities across the country, passed a motion calling for the elimination of school police. That motion will be discussed at the June 17 Area meeting and will be voted on by the House of Representatives before becoming the official position of UTLA.
  - UTLA leaders Cecily Myart-Cruz and Alex Caputo-Pearl, along with members of the UTLA Board, joined with other labor union leaders and community organizations for a press conference on June 8 to publicly support the demands for racial justice and for redirecting funding from the police toward the needs of communities.
  - UTLA will continue to discuss racial justice issues as educators, provide resources for anti-racist teaching, and mobilize support for actions in the struggle for Black lives and racial justice.
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## **7. Our school police are part of our school community. Why should we get rid of them?**

Of course, there are some school police who we get along well with and like as people. But this is not about individuals.

We have to remember that not everyone has the same experience with police. The issue is the system. Often, behaviors that should be addressed within the school community are instead outsourced to police, and such infractions create a record that follows a young person throughout their educational career and limits the scope of their opportunities. The UTLA Board believes that we do not need armed police roaming our halls – we need counselors who are provided with resources, nurses with sufficient medical supplies, and librarians loaded up with books.

We support a just transition for school police workers, including training, support, and opportunities to take on other work in a way that is good for them and good for society. What do you think our kids need more, counselors or police?

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## **8. What are alternatives to policing to keep the public and our schools safe?**

Fully funded Community Schools and well-staffed educator teams are the answer to keeping our public schools safe. This means small class sizes and a real investment in our HHS members – counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists – and a deep connection to service providers off campus.

Examples of responding to a crisis without calling the police (as taken and adapted from Luna Syenite, inspired by Mariame Kabe):

- Imagine texting a number and an unarmed urgent responder trained in behavioral and mental health comes within 5 minutes to help students who have engaged in harmful behavior. An hour later that student is safe and getting the support they need.
  - Imagine a student is experiencing a mental health crisis and is afraid; their peers and educators are afraid. Instead of calling school police, a first responder trained in mental health comes to the school. One hour later, the student is in a safe place with consent and plans for followup, continued care.
  - Imagine someone is selling drugs among the students. Instead of calling the police, both the student selling drugs and those purchasing are connected to a substance use service that intervenes in harmful drug transactions. Students are supported in healthy outcomes and the seller takes accountability for the harm.
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**9. This school policing policy seems like a distraction. UTLA should be focused on school-site issues and funding. Why are we getting involved in this?**

We know that our schools are in desperate need but the massive underfunding we are experiencing is directly connected to the issue of racial justice. UTLA has been part of coalitions since 2014 to:

- Get LA School Police to give up the military-grade armored tanks and automatic rifles it got from a federal program
- Stop ticketing students for tardiness and truancy (which threw them into the legal system)
- Stop the practice of so-called random searches
- Stop the practice of pepper spray

The students of LAUSD are more than 88% students of color, and LAUSD serves more Black students than any school district in the state of California, and more than most districts across the country. For years, our schools have faced cuts while local police departments have been expanded. In a school district like LAUSD, a school budget is in many ways a snapshot of the amount of racism in our society. The budget is a moral document. A just society would increase school funding, not police funding.

Because we have the power of a large organization, we have a responsibility to build the movement for Black lives in this moment and in doing so we are helping change the priorities of our society.

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**10. Why does the UTLA Board motion prioritize money for Black students?**

The reason it should go in greater proportion to Black students is the same reason why we say Black Lives Matter. Right now, Black people are the ones being most harmed by the system, and we should prioritize using this money to redress the harm that has already been done to them. Absolutely we need all schools to be safe, but there is such a debt owed to Black students that we should make this commitment to them.