



**National  
Urban League**

*Empowering Communities.  
Changing Lives.*

March 12, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1223 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
233 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Re: H.R. 4909, the STOP School Violence Act of 2018**

Dear Speaker Ryan and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Urban League and its 90 local affiliates in urban communities across 37 states and the District of Columbia, we urge you to oppose H.R.4909, the STOP School Violence Act. We are concerned that the anonymous reporting and threat assessment systems as proposed in H.R. 4909 would have the unintended consequence of criminalizing students of color, stripping away their rights to due process and forcing them into the school-to-prison pipeline.

The so-called STOP School Violence Act proposes the development of anonymous reporting systems for threats of school violence without guaranteeing due process protections for students against whom a report was made. While discrimination in our nation's schools has been outlawed for over fifty years, civil rights data have persistently shown disproportionate high rates of suspensions and expulsions for students of color. The latest data indicate that black students are suspended and expelled from schools at three times the rate of their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup> White students are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school for objectively identifiable offenses like smoking and destruction of property, while black and Hispanic students are more likely to be suspended or expelled for more subjective offenses like excessive noise and loitering.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that these racial disparities in school discipline are largely due to racial discrimination and implicit bias by teachers, administrators and school resource officers.<sup>3</sup> Without robust and meaningful oversight and enforcement of civil rights protections and due process for students who may have been wrongfully accused, we are concerned the proposed anonymous reporting system will exacerbate racial disparities in school discipline and further harm students of color.

Additionally, this bill also proposes the development and operation of school threat assessment and intervention teams in conjunction with law enforcement agencies. We are concerned that increasing police presence in schools will worsen the school-to-prison pipeline crisis. In addition to facing higher rates of suspensions and expulsions from school, black students are 2.3 times as likely to receive a referral to law enforcement or be subject to a school-related arrest as white students.<sup>4</sup> Students who are arrested, detained, or lose instructional time are more likely to drop out of school, face unemployment and enter the criminal justice system. Militarizing our nation's public schools is the wrong approach to gun reform. This bill will criminalize historically marginalized students and will not keep our children safe.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HSClimate2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.naacpldf.org/files/about-us/Bias\\_Reportv2017\\_30\\_11\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.naacpldf.org/files/about-us/Bias_Reportv2017_30_11_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/blog/racial-justice/race-and-inequality-education/it-time-get-real-about-school-policing>.



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Gun violence has no place in our nation's schools and neither does bias against students of color. Congress must do all it can to ensure all students have access to safe and supportive learning environments, while protecting the rights of marginalized students. We need reform at every level. Congress should invest in evidenced-based practices designed to create safe learning environments in schools, such as access to positive behavioral supports and interventions, school counselors and access to mental health services. We also need sensible gun reform that includes raising the minimum age for purchasing and possessing a handgun from 18 to 21, requiring background checks at gun shows and limiting gun purchases to one a month per individual.

Congress must balance the need to keep our children safe while ensuring no harm to any of our nation's children, particularly historically marginalized students. For these reasons, we urge you to oppose H.R. 4909, the STOP School Violence Act. If you have any questions, please contact me or Susie Saavedra, our Senior Director for Policy and Legislative Affairs at [ssaavedra@nul.org](mailto:ssaavedra@nul.org).

Sincerely,

Marc H. Morial  
President and CEO