

We are the Worthington students and alumni who created the petition demanding that Worthington Schools cut ties with the police. We appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of our concerns at your meeting on June 2. In advance of your next meeting on June 22, we are now writing to convey the following personal statement of support from someone who signed our letter:

Worthington police are useless. They can call themselves “good cops” all they want but if they actually listened to understand instead of listening to react then maybe they’d understand. I’ve never been more flabbergasted by the immature behavior exhibited by ADULTS much less adults that are armed. One of them told me it didn’t matter if he had his hands on his gun or on his shoulders when obviously it makes a difference otherwise the phrase “hands up” would mean nothing. If it didn’t make a difference, why do Black people get shot by white cops that feel uncomfortable because they “think they had a weapon.” This man has his hand on an ACTUAL weapon and told me I was in no place to feel uncomfortable. Another one told me I should be grateful that they’re letting us break the law. Another one told me that what happened to George Floyd was unfortunate but it had nothing to do with him because he “wasn’t there when it happened.” Like no shit you weren’t there, it was in Minneapolis. I typically do not believe in insulting people’s intelligence because it creates a stigma, but they honestly may have been the dumbest people I’ve ever come across. And one of them whined for 5+ minutes about a girl telling him that he wasn’t doing a good job. Customer service workers have to go through more verbal attacks than cops, he can grow a spine. They think with their egos, have zero empathy or compassion, and are useless. Black Lives Matter, fuck white supremacy, and get the cops out of the damn schools and push for getting them out of the damn city.

- Former student, TWHS 2018

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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We are the Worthington students and alumni who created the petition demanding that Worthington Schools cut ties with the police. We appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of our concerns at your meeting on June 2. In advance of your next meeting on June 22, we are now writing to convey the following personal statement of support from someone who signed our letter:

**As a black and middle eastern woman I would call ANYONE LITERALLY anyone before if I call the police because they would just murder me and IF YOU DON'T agree I Hope you rot in hell just like the rest of the racists. ALL COPS ARE BASTARDS.  
#BLACKLIVESFUCKINGMATTER**

**- Former WKHS Student**

We hope that you consider this student's statement as you respond to our demands. Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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We are the Worthington students and alumni who created the petition demanding that Worthington Schools cut ties with the police. We appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of our concerns at your meeting on June 2. In advance of your next meeting on June 22, we are now writing to convey the following personal statement of support from someone who signed our letter:

**I am one of the authors of the letter on cutting ties with the police that was sent to you prior to your meeting on June 2. I appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of the concerns we raised in our letter, which now has almost 1,745 signatures. I was also pleased to hear that the district is planning to hire a coordinator of diversity, equity, and inclusion, although, as you said, we still have a long way to go.**

**I graduated from WKHS in 2019 and I now attend college out of state. In my first year of college, I soon learned that my peers from other parts of the country have false stereotypes about our state of Ohio. Ohio, to them, is a white, rural, flyover state**

without much to offer. A state whose population does not accept or advocate for people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized groups. A state that watches idly as people on the coast, in places like New York or California, fight for change on the streets and in the government. Their stereotypes offend me, because I, an Indian-American person of color who lives near a major city and is passionate about political activism, am proof that they're wrong. I'm proud to be from Worthington, Ohio.

Yet I have to admit that in a place like Worthington, there is some truth to their stereotypes. As a woman of color and a non-Christian, I grew up painfully aware that I was not like most of my classmates in the west side of Worthington. In art class, I was taught that peach crayons were "skin color," even though they didn't look like my skin. Teachers never knew how to react to my name, or any names they were unfamiliar with, when reading attendance. In the twelve years I spent in Worthington, I had one teacher of color. My college peers assume that I grew up in a very white environment--and they're right.

As I grew up, I began to understand how this lack of diversity impacted the culture of our schools. One impact was a mainstream refusal to get "political"--many of my white classmates said they were "not political" about racial issues, without realizing that their white privilege enabled them to think of daily, life-and-death realities for people of color as matters of petty political disagreement. In my freshman year of high school, the administration responded to my concerns about an offensive portrayal of a Native American mascot in the homecoming window painting contest by saying they were "sorry" I was offended but could do nothing about it. As a young woman, I remained silent as teachers used misogynistic language and anti-feminist rhetoric. As an Indian-American, I remained silent as teachers and students openly stereotyped my family's culture, and I obeyed teachers who singled me out to ask questions about my heritage in front of the class, turning me into the "native informant." I took history courses about Europe and the United States and had few opportunities to study my own ancestors, whose histories are never required and are offered as, at best, an elective. I watched "patriotic" Veterans' Day videos that glorify violence against people across the world who look like me. My college peers assume that I grew up in an environment that often failed to value diversity and prioritize justice--and they're right.

In all those instances, I felt uncomfortable. But I often didn't speak up for myself because if I did, I'd be causing discomfort for the white majority, and I'd be blamed for rocking the boat. Yet the reality is that white comfort at the expense of students of color is not smooth sailing. This is something that the white folks who have authority in this district often fail to recognize. As Dr. Martin Luther King has said, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." To achieve that justice, those with authority in our district must be willing to see our discomfort and stand with us. Stand with students of color and other students from marginalized groups to say, *This is our struggle, too.*

Although I do not have white privilege, I do have class privilege, as well as the privilege that comes with being a non-Black person. I am privileged because the "success stories" of families like mine are used to perpetuate the model minority myth that reinforces anti-Blackness and white supremacy. Those privileges put me in the position to invest in extracurriculars, take challenging courses, and develop close relationships with teachers. But too many Worthington students are left out of these opportunities. There is only so much that you, as a school board, can do to diversify the overall demographics of our school, which result from segregation and redlining. But you *can* address the deep and pervasive segregation within our schools. At Kilbourne, courses and extracurriculars are largely divided along racial lines. I also witnessed how many students of color are over-disciplined on a regular basis. This is unacceptable, and you have the power to change these patterns and this culture by further investing in diversity officers at the schools, measures to increase diversity among teachers and staff, conflict resolution training, and mental health resources. *This is your struggle, too.*

On the question of divesting from the police, I urge you to consider this quote by anti-apartheid activist Desmond Tutu: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." We are not a majority-Black school district, and most of us do not live in over-policed neighborhoods. For this reason, it might feel easy to let this issue go and keep the SROs. It might feel like we can afford to do this, to remain silent. But we have to ask ourselves--who is that "we"? And what is the cost?

Remaining “neutral” and refusing to get “political” by maintaining our ties with police means ignoring marginalized students in our district, as well as the transformative potential of the present moment in our society. Our letter outlines why divesting from police would be beneficial for our community. But it’s not just about us. It’s not just a matter of whether individuals at our schools have positive relationships with the individual police officers stationed in them. It’s certainly not a matter of whether the CPD officer at Kilbourne was personally present when his coworkers used violent force against peaceful protestors, including Worthington students, downtown. This is about the much bigger issues of police brutality and systemic racism. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Black-led organizers of this movement are advocating for an end to policing in schools. If we cut ties with the police, it will be a powerful symbolic statement that shows solidarity with that movement. It will also contribute to immediate change by removing money and resources by our over-funded police departments. *This is our struggle, too.*

I appreciate the thoroughness with which you want to first examine the issue. But if there was ever a moment to divest from police, that moment is now. Structural racism is a global pandemic, and we must treat with the swiftness and urgency with which our district responded to COVID-19. At the meeting, you mentioned that people argue removing resource officers is a “knee-jerk” reaction. Yet it’s the police who have a “knee-jerk” reaction. It was a police officer who killed George Floyd in eight minutes and forty-six seconds by literally putting a knee on his neck. It was a Columbus police officer who shot and killed 13-year-old Tyre King multiple times. It was a Columbus police officer who shot and killed 23-year-old Henry Green seven times. It was a Columbus police officer who shot and killed 39-year-old Christopher Wade at a Westerville hospital. The list goes on.

Our demands are not a knee-jerk reaction. They are part of a movement that is continuing a 400-year-long struggle for justice. By meeting our demands, you will be responding appropriately to the police’s knee-jerk reactions to Black people in our community and our country, reactions that result in death without accountability.

These last few weeks have shown, unequivocally, that our state and community are so much more than the stereotypes I discussed earlier. The Columbus protests gained national attention early in the movement *because* of realities that defy those stereotypes about Ohio. *Because* our community is extremely diverse, and has a sizeable Black population. *Because* Columbus is a major city. *Because* we have a history of resistance and protests, and *because* we have played a significant role in this country's story. Ohio has the chance to continue making history by passing the pending statewide resolution to declare racism a public health crisis; Franklin County, alongside other towns and counties in the state, has already done so. Now, there have been protests not just in cities but also in rural towns, from Nelsonville to Zanesville. Ohio is refusing to be counted out. People from all over the state are saying, *this is our struggle, too*.

Two years ago, I helped lead Kilbourne's walkout against gun violence. The March for Our Lives Walkouts were a remarkable show of solidarity--students walked out of school nationwide to stand with the students in Parkland, Florida and all the other places where there have been school shootings. Now, Kilbourne and Thomas students and alumni are leading protests against police brutality, joining the uprisings happening in all fifty states. I was proud to be from Worthington then, and I am even more proud now. I have a younger sibling who will start high school next year, and I'm proud to say that unlike me, she will enter a school with students who stand in solidarity with each other. Students who are unafraid to say, in this historic moment, *this is our struggle, too*.

Columbus City Schools have chosen not to renew their contract with the CPD; instead, they have formed a working group to come up with alternative methods of student safety. Now, it's your turn to stand with our students. Let's stop being passive. Let's stop waiting on the sidelines. Let's stop pretending it's smooth sailing. Instead, let's start acknowledging the forces that rock the boat. Let's be leaders in our allyship. Let's stand up and say, *this is our struggle, too*.

--Former student, WKHS '19

We hope that you consider this student's statement as you respond to our demands. Thank you for your time.

## Worthington for Black Lives

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We are the Worthington students and alumni who created the letter demanding that Worthington Schools cut ties with the police. [Our letter](#) now has 1,745 signatures. We appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of our concerns at your meeting on June 2. We were also pleased to hear that the district is planning to hire a coordinator of diversity, equity, and inclusion, although, as you said, we still have a long way to go.

Based on your discussion at the last meeting, we have made the following additional demands related to the hiring of a district Coordinator of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

1. As some of you mentioned, we demand that the district invest sufficient time and money in hiring a well-paid person/well-paid people for this position.
2. We demand that the person/people hired for this position identify as BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color).
3. We demand that students, including students who are BIPOC, are not just included but centered in the hiring process for this position.
4. We demand that the district consider hiring more than one person for this position, to create a committee of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds that represent the diversity of our schools.
5. We demand that the district also hire coordinators of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the individual schools, so that they are in direct contact with students on a regular basis.
6. We demand transparency from the board throughout the hiring process for these positions, and we demand that the board clearly explain to our community the exact role of the diversity, equity, and inclusion coordinator(s) in our district.

We would also like to highlight, again, our previously stated demands from the letter signed by 1,745 students, alumni, parents, teachers, and community members. We still demand that:

1. Worthington City Schools immediately ends its contracts with the Columbus and Worthington Police Departments, and pulls the resource officers from our schools.
2. The district publicly condemns the Columbus Police Department for its unchecked violence against protestors, and acknowledges historical and continued injustice against the Black community in our city.
3. The school board reallocates the approximately \$100,000 per year it would save by divesting from the police departments toward several resources for students and faculty.
  - a. First, we demand that the school system commit to hiring a diversity officer, highlight the diversity within our school system, and increase diversity among our faculty in the entire district.
  - b. Next, we demand better mental health resources in our schools. We want more than just a therapy dog, we want access to professional help whenever we are faced with a crisis.
  - c. Finally, we demand that all faculty are regularly trained in conflict resolution. Without police, faculty should be able to safely de-escalate any conflict that should arise, whether it be between two teachers, two students, or a student and a teacher. Worthington is a community, and as a community we should be there for each other.

At the meeting, many of you said that you want more data, especially from people of color. Here is the data:

1. Out of the fifteen largest US cities, a study shows that [police in our city of Columbus kill Black people at the highest rate](#) – 91.9 per every million Black people.
2. [A survey showing that Columbus' Black community has concerns about police](#) revealed that just 43% of Black residents believe police make decisions that benefit all residents, while 70% of white residents believe so.
3. [A study](#) shows that even members of the Columbus Police Department, as well as community members, have witnessed police officers using excessive force against minorities.

4. Tyrie King, Henry Green, and numerous others have died at the hands of Columbus Police.

If you take action now, you will join a national movement against police brutality, institutional racism, and injustice. This movement has reached Columbus; we ask that you follow [the example of Columbus City Schools](#), which cut ties with police and formed a working group on student safety.

To learn more about the need for these demands and about the Black-led organizations that are making them, we recommend that you use the following resources:

1. [Police Free Schools FAQ](#)
2. [8 to Abolition Demands - Removing Police from Schools](#)
3. [M4BL - Invest/Divest](#)
4. [4 Ways Racial Inequity Harms American Schoolchildren](#)

Sincerely,  
Worthington for Black Lives

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**Worthington is a place/community that I spend a lot of time and I know many families and students that have ties to Worthington City Schools. The time for change is now. Stand on the right side of history and cut ties with Worthington City Police Department.**

--Community member

We hope that you consider this student's statement as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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**This is not just about what the majority wants. White students and parents make up the vast majority of Worthington City Schools. Of course white students and parents feel safe with the presence of police in schools—the law enforcement system does not target them. White parents don't have to worry about their children being murdered by police every time they get on a school bus. This is not the case for our Black students and parents. If even one student, let alone an entire group of students, do not feel safe in our schools, this should tell you that there is a problem.**

**This petition now has almost 1,700 signatures. Let that sink in. Nearly two thousand people see that this is a problem. It should not matter how many people don't think this is a problem at this point. People who do not recognize this as a problem are not paying enough attention to the voices of Black students who are making it clear that they do not feel safe with police in our schools.**

**This petition's letter has given you the statistics. You are aware that our Black students are being put at risk when they walk through the front doors of our schools every day. You know about the school to prison pipeline and the disproportionate rate at which Black students are arrested in schools.**

WPD and CPD are not immune from these statistics. Even if our current SROs are “well liked” by some students, this does not change the fact that they are cops who work in an inherently racist system. This does not change the fact that our schools will not have the same SROs forever— who’s to say that our next SROs won’t be “good cops?” It only takes one “bad cop” to ruin or take the life of a student.

There are so many other solutions to protect against school shootings. Spend this money to fix this problem at its root. Hire more mental health professionals. Teach classes about gun violence. Train people who handle disciplinary actions, like deans, in deescalation strategies if you don’t want teachers to have that responsibility. A policeman with a gun should not be the one breaking up fights between children.

There is no arguing that the police system has racist origins and continues to be an anti-Black institution today. History and statistics do not lie. Yet we are currently contracted to have this same racist institution in our own schools this fall. ALL students deserve to feel safe here, not just the white ones. Black students matter.

There is a national movement for Black lives happening at this very moment. We as a country are listening, educating ourselves, recognizing our mistakes, and changing for the better. Is Worthington going to be apart of this?

--Former student at WKHS

We hope that you consider this student's statement as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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on June 22, we are now writing to convey the following personal statement of support from someone who signed our letter:

**Education is about free thinking and independence, not obedience and control. Investing in diversity, mental health, and conflict resolution is investing in students; investing in resource officers is investing in their submission, and it is a reactive measure rather than a preventive one. The mere presence of police in schools communicates to students that they are bodies to be controlled; the presence of mental health resources communicates to students that they are people to be valued. If Worthington City Schools believe that Black lives matter and want to provide the best education possible, they should cut ties with the Columbus and Worthington police departments.**

**“Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”**

**-Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from the Birmingham Jail**

**Verbal support is nothing without direct action. How do you plan to change the world?**

**--Former student at WKHS**

We hope that you consider this student's statement as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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I was keenly aware, in my time in Worthington schools, that my more offbeat peers were being stereotyped and dismissed by the very adults who should have been protecting their futures. The situation got dramatically worse in the aftermath of Columbine.

Schools should be safe places for young people to explore their identities. Schools should focus their resources on opening doors and expanding possibilities for their students, not stereotyping and criminilizing them.

I assure you, teenagers of color and teenagers who dress a little differently are already being followed around by security guards at every store they go to, and stared down by mothers of younger children every time they go to the park. These are Worthington's children, too, and their schools should be a safe haven.

**Get cops out of our schools!**

--Linworth and WKHS Alum

We hope that you consider this current student's statement as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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We are the Worthington students and alumni who created the petition demanding that Worthington Schools cut ties with the police. We appreciate that you took the time to discuss some of our concerns at your meeting on June 2. In advance of your next meeting on June 22, we are now writing to convey the following personal statement of support from this current WKHS and Linworth student:

**Please cut ties. You're doing more harm than you think.**

We hope that you consider this current student's statement as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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I was at the first protests in front of the Statehouse the weekend of May 26, during the middle of the day. At 11:50 AM, I was pepper sprayed by CPD officers in riot gear along with my fellow protestors. At noon, the SWAT was called in, and they set off the first tear gas canisters. Knowing that the police officer that guards our school was on duty, and working for the people that sprayed us with chemicals makes me glad I'm no longer being kept safe by him.

At the last school board meeting, Mr. Banks informed us that our SRO's shift at the protests was during the day, and the members of the board claimed that there was no violence during this time, by police or others, until after our SRO's shift was over. This is false, and I know because I have personally experienced violence by police against me in the middle of the day. Based on this claim, it is apparent that the members of the schoolboard are not entirely aware of the whole situation, and if they are, they are being dishonest to the people they serve, which is even more concerning.

I know that there are several other current Kilbourne students who were at the downtown protests, and if I were still a student, I would not feel comfortable around someone who works with the person who assaulted me. I never felt safe around him, to begin with, and if I ever had to go back into school, I would actively avoid him. I felt more safe in Linworth, a school that never had any police presence or even security guards.

The police are more likely to use force against BIPOC than white people. Having a police officer in our school contributes directly to the school to prison pipeline: if an SRO intervenes in a situation involving a student, it could go on that student's permanent record. If that student is not white, there will be less opportunities for them in the future, because they are now a "dangerous criminal" forever.

Because I am a white person, I never had any bad experiences with cops before I started to speak up against them. But I also have never had any positive experiences with them. I never felt that our SRO was contributing positively to our school's community. I don't even know his name. Many of my classmates didn't know he was a police officer.

Black Lives Matter. ACAB. Making the wrong choice will be devastating for many students, and waiting to make a choice could be even more dangerous. Your students' lives are in your hands.

Caroline Hill, Linworth and Kilbourne 2019

We hope that you consider this former student's story as you respond to our demands. We will soon write to you with a formal statement from our group.

Thank you for your time.

Worthington for Black Lives

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Dear School Board Members,

As a parent of an elementary school student, my family as not yet experienced any interaction with Student Resource Officers. However, I would like to share my thoughts regarding the partnership with Columbus Police Department because, now more than ever, we need to really examine the infrastructure that does not consider the safety of all students, particularly students of color.

Student Resource Officers, police, and armed security can hurt, not help, and does not fit into research-based school interventions. SROs are often filling roles that other professionals are better equipped to provide, such as counselors providing mental health counseling to students, school administrators and teachers administering discipline, and traditional law enforcement enforcing safety. SROs can actually escalate situations, particularly with already vulnerable student populations like students of color and students with disabilities. Without proper training, in-depth knowledge of students, and consistent implementation SROs can react to students with disabilities in a way that can exacerbate their disability's symptoms – and this escalation and lead to these students being removed for their symptoms in violation of federal law. Unfortunately, many students – particularly students of color who are already suspended and expelled at higher rates – come from neighborhoods where tension may already exist with the police. As a result, the mere presence of an officer could escalate a situation as students may view a situation as more serious or likely to have more severe consequences, sending them into hot cognition, or escalation, more quickly. Using punitive law enforcement tactics that readily encourage the use of force can actually further harm student and police relations and lead to increased tension in the school and can create more fear and distrust of law enforcement in both our schools and communities.

I support Worthington City Schools disassociation with the Columbus Police immediately and, instead, reinvest those savings into additional counselors who can provide adequate supports for students. Providing additional support and care reflects the values of the Worthington community and right now is the time to make these changes. Many of our students struggle at home and school – and to know them, love them, and create a safe space for everyone is essential.

I suggest that Worthington City Schools go one step further take steps to positively embrace the Black Lives Matters movement and engage students and staff alike to check their biases and actively work to understand the reality of students of color. As a parent of a Black child, I can say that living in a predominantly white community worries me. Not for overt racist actions, but the subtle ones that even some of the most well-intentioned white people don't see. There

is much research available – I ask that you consult professionals who can comment specifically on the toll SROs have on the health and wellbeing of our students. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kelly McConaughey

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Worthington, OH 43085