

# THE SACRAMENTO BEE

## Republican Lawmaker Calls for Armed Police Officers in Every California School

Andrew Sheeler

February 20, 2024

California schools would be required to have at least one armed police officer, also known as a school resource officer or SRO, on campus during regular school hours, under a bill introduced last week.

Assembly Bill 3038, by Assemblyman Bill Essayli, R-Corona, is part of a trio of public safety bills that the lawmaker unveiled in a Tuesday morning press conference.

“California has experienced 96 school shootings between 2018 and 2023. If we want to get serious about preventing school shootings and stopping them before they can happen, we need good guys, and girls, with guns, ready to act,” Essayli said.

The bill is likely to be opposed by the American Civil Liberties Union, which in 2021 published a report identifying the dangers of more police officers in public schools.

“The data conclusively show harmful and discriminatory policing patterns in schools. School police contribute to the criminalization of tens of thousands of California students, resulting in them being pushed out of school and into the school-to-prison pipeline,” according to an ACLU of Southern California statement.

The report found that Black students were 7.4 times more likely to be arrested in schools with assigned law enforcement than they were in schools without. Latino students were 6.9 times more likely to be arrested, while students with disabilities were 4.6 times more likely.

The data also show that Black students were disproportionately more likely to be handcuffed, arrested and subjected to harsh penalties compared to students as a whole.

“No school in California should have a permanent police officer. School districts should not be able to create their own police departments or reserve forces, nor should they coordinate with any outside law enforcement agency to station law enforcement on a school campus,” the ACLU said in its recommendation.

The libertarian-leaning Cato Institute and the National Education Association have both also questioned whether SROs make schools safer, with both organizations sharing research showing that they do not.

Essayli also introduced Assembly Bill 3037, which would make it easier for a judge to add firearm-related sentencing enhancements. Sentencing enhancements, as the name suggests, are tacked on to an initial sentence and can result in substantially more prison time for the convicted party.

“This is a smart gun law. The laws they (Democrats) like to pass, I call them dumb laws, they go after people like CCW holders. We like smart gun laws,” Essayli said of his bill.

Finally, Essayli introduced Assembly Bill 3039, which would make it much easier for potential jurors to be dismissed from jury selection because of their views on the police.

“Having a fair and impartial jury decide cases is a fundamental bedrock of our American justice system. Bias in any form must be rejected during the jury selection process,” Essayli said.

The bill is a direct response to a 2020 law, signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom, that made it so that jurors could not be subject to “peremptory challenge” on the basis of their distrust in law enforcement unless the disqualifying party can prove “by clear and convincing evidence” that their rationale for disqualifying the potential juror “is unrelated to the prospective juror’s identity group and that the reasons articulated affect the prospective juror’s ability to be fair and impartial in the case,” according to a 2020 bill analysis.

None of the three bills have been assigned to a committee yet. All three bills may receive multiple committee referrals.

It’s possible all three will be assigned to the Assembly Public Safety Committee. It’s also likely that AB 3037 and 3039 will be assigned to the Assembly Judiciary Committee, while AB 3038 will likely also go before the Assembly Education Committee.

The bill faces a likely uphill climb in the Legislature, with Democrats controlling a supermajority in both houses and criminal justice reform proponents in control of key committees.