

**Comments made by Mayor John Ruocco to the Board of Education on the School Resource Officer position.**

**Date: September 24, 2018**

Members of the Board,

My name is John Ruocco. As the Mayor of Hillsdale, I would like to reemphasize that which the Hillsdale Council unanimously requested of you via resolution on Sept 11. Namely, that you reconsider the level of financial support that you currently afford the Borough for providing a School Resource Officer to the Pascacak Valley HS.

First, let me say that I don't believe that there is **any** substantial disagreement between yourselves and the Borough that having a School Resource Officer advances the effectiveness of community policing in our area. If that were true, you would not have been willing to pay \$40,000 annually to reimburse the Borough in the past when it was able to provide an SRO. School Resource Officers enhance the wellbeing and safety of students, teachers and administrators. The presence of a full time SRO is considered one of the best ways that police can become knowledgeable about teen drug, social, and disciplinary problems before they become real threats. It lays the groundwork for trust and unencumbered communication between our young people and those who protect them. I think we are all in agreement on that.

I know from discussions with the Superintendent that you have approved several initiatives, at no small cost, to improve the safety of students at both Hills and Valley. I fully appreciate that, given circumstances that have occurred nation-wide.

Safety, safety for our children, safety for our residents and visitors, is Hillsdale's number one goal. Maintaining public order and assuring the safety of inhabitants is always the #1 goal of government. Law enforcement represents the largest portion of Hillsdale's \$14MM budget, about one third. So it was with some concern that I learned of the recent decision of our Council's Police Committee to add an additional officer to the force to insure that the HPD could continue to provide a School Resource Officer to Pascack Valley HS. Concern NOT because I

think a School Resource Officer is unneeded, but because the funding of that position had not yet been put on a fiscally sound basis.

I have spent most of my professional career trying to evaluate the **complete** effects of financial actions, both short and long-term. That probably sets me apart from most elected officials and politicians in this state, who tend to look only at the short-term, coinciding with their term in office. But we all need to recognize that increasing the size of our police force to 19 officers means that Hillsdale takes on additional financial liabilities of about \$7 million over 30 years. **That is but one police officer**, hired specifically to allow for a School Resource Officer in Pascack Valley HS. Your contributions of \$40,000 per year would amount to only 17% of that.

Permit me to present my concern in a more concrete terms. The full-time police officer who currently serves as your School Resource Officer represents about a \$134,000 annual expenditure to the Borough when you consider salary and benefits. And every year from now, that expenditure will increase. And your reimbursement of only \$40,000 annually means that the taxpayers of Hillsdale have to come up with an extra \$62,000 to keep that officer in the school.

Now I put it to you---why must only one town shoulder that expense at a **regional** high school district? Why are you unwilling to reimburse Hillsdale for the true expense of providing an SRO.

I have been told your reluctance to take on the additional cost, insignificant as it is when compared to the District's budget (which by the way is 4x the Borough's budget) has something to do with equity—that Pascack Valley would have a School Resource Officer, but Pascack Hills would not. Well, that equity issue exists now, and the remedy would seem to be to place a School Resource Officer in Hills, that is, if you truly think that having a School Resource Officer is a good thing for those students. It seems you **do** think it's a good thing, but only at an unrealistic price, to the detriment of Hillsdale taxpayers.

As the Mayor of Hillsdale, I find that objectionable. It's my job to speak out in the strongest of terms when Hillsdale residents are being taken advantage of. If the Board doesn't think that the presence of a School Resource officer adds sufficient value that equates to the true cost of providing one, please say that in a letter to the Chief and the Council's Police Committee. Hopefully, they would then

re-examine their decision to increase the size of our Police Department, given your views. That will save the taxpayers of Hillsdale an estimated \$7 million over 30 years.

But frankly, that's not how I hope this matter will be resolved. I hope and ask that you reconsider the level of your reimbursement to the Borough, keep the School Resource Officer doing the important work he does, and reflect in your budget the true cost of having a School Resource Officer at PVHS.

This matter is more than just recognizing what is financially equitable and fair. It is about being a good neighbor to the host community of Hillsdale that protects and supports ALL the students who attend PVHS, regardless of what town they come from.

I thank you for listening, and would like to hear your response.