

# A PEATC

Do You Know....



## Factsheet for Virginia's Parents The Role of School Resource Officers (SROs)

### What is a School Resource Officer (SRO)?

Under Virginia state law §9.1-101, a school resource officer (SRO) is defined as a “certified law enforcement officer hired by a local law enforcement agency to provide law enforcement and security services to Virginia public elementary and secondary schools.”

That’s a lot of words. What it means is that an SRO is a police officer that works for the local police department but **provides law enforcement services in public schools**. SROs operate under a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** between the school board and the law enforcement agency per §22.1-280.2:3.

SROs are not required by law, and not all schools have an SRO.

### What is the Role of the SRO?

The role of the SRO is defined in an MOU between the school board and the police department but, they generally have full law enforcement authority over students and staff. They can stop, question, charge, arrest, use restraints, and other police practices that are consistent with their role as law enforcement, or as defined in the MOU. All actions taken by SROs must be consistent with state and federal laws. So, if your child’s school has an SRO and the school either sees a crime take place (e.g., assault, weapons, drugs) or suspects a crime is taking place, they have the full authority of law enforcement to act, unless otherwise specified in the MOU.

SROs **should not be used to address school discipline matters**, such as violations of the Student Code of Conduct. These violations should be addressed by school officials. However, according to the Legal Aid Justice Center, this is a “grey area” in Virginia’s criminal code and school codes of contact. In practice it does occur; so it’s important to know what is in the MOU.

Before they can work in a school, SROs are required to receive **specific training**, including, but not limited, to mediation, de-escalation, **alternatives to restraint**, cultural diversity and bias **as well as how to work with students**

### References/Resources

[Code of Virginia 8.1.101-SRO Definition](#)

[Code of Virginia 22.1-280.2:3](#)

[DCJS - Model Memorandum of Understanding](#)

[DCJS - School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide](#)

[Legal Aid Justice Center - School Resource Officers and Virginia Law](#)

[National School Safety and Security Services- children with Special Needs and the SRO](#)



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**with disabilities**, including behavioral health and substance use disorders. However, although **training in alternatives to restraint** is required, the state regulations governing seclusion and restraint in Virginia **do not apply to SROs** because they are not school employees. This impacts students with disabilities who are disproportionately subjected to restraint in some school divisions.

In **school divisions which do not use SROs** or where certain schools may not have SROs, the chief law enforcement officer in that jurisdiction must **designate an officer to serve as a liaison to the school administrator**. That officer must receive crisis, emergency management and medical emergency response plan training per §22.1-279.8.

## What does the MOU do?

The MOU between the school board and the law enforcement agency sets **the parameters of SRO duties** in that school division. While MOUs in school divisions may vary from one another; **they must be based on the model MOU** developed by the **Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)**. In addition to being a certified law enforcement officer, DCJS must **certify** the law enforcement officer as a SRO.

The MOUs are subject to **public input**. The MOU can be reviewed or changed as agreed upon by both parties. It must be reviewed at least once every two years. To find out the responsibilities of the SROs in your school division, **you can request a copy of the MOU**.

## Special Considerations for Students with Disabilities

Often, the school division does not take part in selecting the SROs. Therefore, although the SRO received training, they **may not have direct experience in working with students with disabilities**. While SROs should not be engaged in disciplinary situations or behavior management, it all too often happens.

If you have a child with a disability, **introduce them to the SRO** in your school. That way, the SRO knows who your child is and how they react in difficult situations. This can make all the difference in **ensuring your child remains safe and that behavioral incidents don't become criminal referrals**.

## What About School Security Officers (SSOs)?

An **SSO works for the school division** not the law enforcement agency. They **do not have police authority** but are there, according to §9.1-101 to **maintain order and discipline, prevent crime, investigate violations of school policies, and detail students violating the laws or policies of the school**.

SSOs must be **certified by DCJS**. The **school division** sets the responsibilities of the SSO, and this does not require public input.

In **Wordlow v. Chicago Bd. of Ed. (2018)** – a federal court found that the **division had to defend claims by the family of a 6-year-old special education student related to the SRO's decision to handcuff her for taking candy from her teacher**.

The Court stated that every district should have procedures in place to **ensure appropriate training for security personnel on how to interact with students, including those with disabilities**. If a school district fails to provide such training, it **could find itself liable for constitutional violations** its employees might commit.

**PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.**

**For more information about us, please contact:**

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