

Comments Made at the Indian River School Board Meeting of June 23, 2025, by Town of Ocean View Representatives in Support of Funding the SRO program for Towns and Bringing Ocean Views Funding Level up to that of the other Towns!

(Background: At the May 19, 2025, Meeting of the Board they took no action on the Town SRO agreements while increasing the funding level and number of Delaware State Police SRO).

Mayor John Reddington

At the May 19th Board meeting Board Member Mark Steele first emphasized the need for greater discipline in our schools. We wholeheartedly agree. But, later during the same meeting he stated, “I’m all about school safety, but with the current budget, there’s just no room.” No room” , no room for trained police officers on school grounds, even as national school shooting statistics paint a chilling picture. Does Mr. Steele not recognize the relationship of discipline to safety and the role of an SRO in addressing discipline proactively, before things escalate? Does no one else see the contradiction between his stated beliefs and his actions? Seemingly supported by all other board members and the superintendent. Does no one think you might want to consider increased discipline issues and the amount of time the SRO is actually at any given school. We bet there is a correlation!

A true SRO program plays a proactive role in fostering discipline and respect among students—especially at the elementary level, where early intervention and positive influence can shape lifelong behaviors.

Unfortunately, the discussion around SROs sometimes becomes narrowly focused on enforcement. Board members mentioned and seemed to be focusing on the number of citations at a school, while also not aware that there is no standard for what gets written up and what doesn’t.

It's important to remember what an SRO program is supposed to be. It is not about turning schools into precincts or SROs into detectives. Rather, it is a partnership between schools and law enforcement that focuses on relationship-building, education, mentorship, and the promotion of good conduct. SROs are often the first adults a student confides in when facing peer pressure, bullying, or fear. They are (or should be) trained not only in school safety and child development, but also in modern de-escalation tactics and behavioral support. At their best, SROs help students grow into respectful, responsible, and resilient individuals.

The Ocean View Police Department has long embraced this model. At Lord Baltimore Elementary, our SRO delivers age-appropriate programming on topics such as drug awareness and prevention, gun safety, conflict resolution, peer pressure, and personal safety. Students learn about responsible behavior, the consequences of poor decisions, and how to treat others—and themselves—with respect. Our SRO also partners closely with the school’s constable, enhancing security and expanding engagement opportunities.

Councilman Steven Cobb

In addition to mentorship and life skills engagement, today's SROs (for sure the Ocean View SRO) are trained to respond to the worst-case scenario: an active shooter or other critical incident. These officers receive specialized training in school-based response tactics, communications, and coordination with first responders. This level of readiness is especially important in elementary schools, where children are developmentally more vulnerable and less able to protect themselves in an emergency.

While the district currently supports school constables in every school—a resource we value—constables are not sworn police officers and do not have the same law enforcement authority or access to statewide emergency communications. SROs bring these critical capabilities and work in coordination with the school's staff and constable to ensure a well-rounded, responsive safety program. The day to day engagement in the schools and familiarity if events occur boost the possibility for better outcomes.

Ocean View taxpayers, like those in other towns and unincorporated Sussex County, contribute to state and county taxes that support the Indian River School District. They also support the DSP operations through taxes, yet the District repeatedly provides more funding support for DSP SRO than the Towns! This is a fundamental conflict in that DSP and the IRSD are state agencies that are funded twice by incorporated Town property owners.

In addition, the Ocean View property owners have repeatedly supported the district during referendums, only to be forgotten when funding our SRO is before you.

Town Manager Carol Houck

Of great concern is the inequitable approach the IRSD has used in its funding of SRO in its schools. First and foremost its approach is subjective and in no way based on time in school(s) or programs offered. It's our understanding that you can't provide any information related to what days or portions of days the DSP or Town SRO spend at any given school.

We believe there should be no difference to what you pay any SRO at any of your schools as all of the police agencies are providing the same service – or should be (with the exception of the valid comments made earlier regarding the DSP already being funded by all of us through state taxes). We push for funding SRO at the same levels even though we know our SRO currently offers more programs.. Unless you're paying each of us our full cost to have an SRO in your school, the payments should be equal. That's the only fair and equitable way to approach this matter.

Today, June 23rd , I'm still waiting for a response from the District to my June 6th request for information regarding when the Board will take action on the Town SRO agreements! We have now been told that there will be an organizational meeting on July 1st where Town SRO will be discussed but attempts to confirm our ability to speak at that meeting were not answered. We were

only told we would need to wait for the agenda that will not be available until tomorrow. Hence, we're here tonight.

As we have shared on other days and in power points and other meetings with representatives of this school district... Your continued decisions to save money by funding the Ocean View SRO at less than half of the other Towns (not to mention that of DSP) is flawed and quite frankly disingenuous given the years of necessary support Ocean View has provided at arrival and dismissals... and again this practice fails to acknowledge our higher than average SRO time in school and higher than average true SRO program offerings.

Chief of Police Kenneth McLaughlin

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kenneth McLaughlin. I am a police officer who has served district communities since 1990, and I have served as the Chief of Police in Ocean View since 2001.

I'm here tonight to respectfully urge you to continue funding the School Resource Officer at Lord Baltimore Elementary School.

There has been some suggestion that an SRO is unnecessary because the school has one constable. I want to point out that there are two constables here tonight to provide security for this meeting. Lord Baltimore Elementary has over 600 students, plus faculty and staff, in the building every day—and only one constable assigned to the entire school.

A School Resource Officer is a fully certified police officer with direct radio communication to the 911 center and other officers. In the event of a school attack or critical incident, this immediate link can shave minutes off the traditional response time—minutes that are absolutely critical in saving lives. A school employee calling 911 does not provide that same level of immediate, coordinated response.

We've seen in high-profile tragedies like the elementary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, that younger children—like those at Lord Baltimore—are especially vulnerable in an emergency. They are physically and emotionally unable to defend themselves. The best protection we can offer them is prevention, presence, and a rapid response. The SRO brings all three.

Beyond crisis response, the SRO at Lord Baltimore engages daily with students. They're a mentor, a role model, and a first line of prevention against violence and disciplinary issues. The presence of the SRO contributes directly to the positive school climate, and it's no coincidence that Lord Baltimore's students are among the best-behaved in the district.

A 2023 study by the National Association of School Resource Officers found that schools with SROs detect threats earlier and respond to them faster. They also reported fewer behavioral issues and stronger relationships between students and staff.

Removing the SRO from Lord Baltimore would not only increase response times—it would send the message that the safety and development of our youngest students is negotiable. I urge you to continue supporting the SRO program.



June 20, 2025 – email sent to the following IRSD Board Members regarding funding the SRO programs of the Towns

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Dear Indian River School Board Members, Superintendent Owens and School SRO Town Managers:

The Town of Ocean View requested an opportunity to meet with our District 4 representatives in advance to their June 23rd Board meeting. The topic of the requested meeting was to share our concerns related to the lack of transparency, respect and importance afforded the SRO agreements with the Towns. A meeting was not possible due to their schedules so please accept this correspondence as another attempt at engagement, and with copy to all members of the Board, Superintendent Owens, and the other Towns that have staffed SRO in your schools.

Of concern is that Indian River School District (IRSD) representatives failed to share information provided by Ocean View in advance to the finance meeting that was pertinent to the discussion and clearly presented for that very purpose. They also failed to place that same information and additional documentation provided in Board Docs for the May 19th meeting until asked to do so by Ocean View once we noticed it had not been added. The district has failed to acknowledge or address this year and in the past, the inequitable funding of the Towns, most notably Ocean View, in comparison to each other and of course that of the Delaware State Police (DSP) SROs.

The randomness that the school board and district representatives have approached its SRO agreements has been unprofessional and ignores the long-standing value-added offerings of the programs like that provided by Ocean View at Lord Baltimore Elementary School. True SRO programs are not simply about write ups/reports of incidents, nor is there a standardized requirement between departments for what should be written up. Unfortunately, board members and perhaps district administrators seem to use this information as a measure of some sort for decision making, while ignoring the preventative impact of SRO programs and in turn its likely result of fewer write ups/reports.

After your May meeting we confirmed with Superintendent Owens that “*No action was taken last evening with regard to the SRO Agreements with the Towns*” at the Board Meeting of May 19, 2025. This was necessary as it was truly unclear to those in attendance (difficult to hear) and upon reviewing your meeting video afterwards, what your position was and where our agreements stood.

On June 6th, our Town Manager made a request of the Superintendent for an update of when the Board plans to “take action on the Town SRO agreements” but has yet to receive a response. Certainly, there should be greater respect for our past engagements and services provided the district that warrant the courtesy of a response from the Superintendent. We have however recently been advised by outgoing Board Member Pryor that a “special meeting” will be held on the topic on July 1st. We certainly appreciate this information. Your calendar notes this as the date for your Organizational meeting, yet to have time or location advertised.

Of prime concern is that the IRSB/and district have also failed to place safety as a priority. It has handled SRO agreements in a haphazard and unprofessional manner, and with at least one board member contradicting himself during the same meeting by touting *discipline must be addressed* followed later by *no support for Town SRO*. SROs should all be funded equally, with no Town or the DSP receiving more than the other, unless fully funding each position based on actual costs to the Towns/DSP. With all due and great respect to the DSP, they don’t warrant more consideration than the Towns in regard to funding. The DSP is funded by state taxes that the Town property owners pay - and the IRSD is funding the DSP SRO positions with funds also paid by Town property owners. The Town Police departments are not supported by state taxes, with the exception of grants for specific programs/projects if applied for and successfully awarded. Your approach is backwards. If anything the Towns should be paid more than DSP for that very reason! We recommend equal treatment even though we are well aware of the added-value offered by our full time SRO in association with the programs we offer.

We plan to be in attendance at the Board meeting of June 23, 2025, and request information on the July 1st “special/organizational” meeting to speak to all of these concerns, possibly more. We hope there might also be representation from the other Towns as well.

We would appreciate if the SRO agreements with the Towns were clearly added to the agenda for open discussion and that we be provided explanations for the lack of transparency and failure to communicate where our agreements stand more than a month later, and singular focus related to the DSP SRO over the Town's.

Thank you – John Reddington, Mayor with,
Steve Cobb, Councilman District 1
Kenneth McLaughlin, Chief of Police
Carol Houck, Town Manager