Dr. Ramos, thank you for leading us towards a conclusion regarding the addition of an SRO to the high school. Your work has been thoughtful and inclusive, and I do support your current decision.

I would like to make a few comments regarding this decision – food for thought.

Declining the generous offer from the townships of Maplewood and South Orange to help fund an SRO in our high school will not make our high school safer. We still lack concrete improvement upon the state of our security affairs that, sadly, allowed for several safety incidents last school year. Nor are we making good on our responsibility to our hard-working teaching, administrative and custodial staff to make their workplace safer. Teachers and administrators do a fantastic job of education and emotional support - but they cannot and should not also bear an unnecessarily large responsibility for school safety.

This decision also does not make good on an equally important district obligation: to not only educate our students, but to also help prepare them for a life outside of our schools.

During the community input on the SRO, we heard from many students. Their words were raw, brave and honest. Their words were also predominantly negative towards the prospect of an SRO being a positive influence on school life. They viewed the SRO, and police in general, with alarming distrust.

Consider that these are teens that we were listening to. Developing minds. Developing citizens. If we don’t reach them now, then when?

I believe that we have a responsibility to show these students that their perceptions may be incomplete. That an SRO can be a force for positive change in our schools. If we can have courageous conversations about police brutality, then we can also have courageous conversations about the good that men and women in uniform do.

And if there is any doubt as to whether an SRO can be a force of good I ask you to look no further than our previous SRO, Michael Morrison.

Michael Morrison is a protector, a mentor, a uniter, a clergyman and a man of color. He trails a thousand accolades from students whose lives he has improved. He is the kind of man that we want to raise our boys to be. Not the kind of man that we want to raise them to fear.

Our obligation as a Board is to listen to our students respectfully and thoughtfully. But we can also endeavor to educate them on different perspectives. The existence of an SRO within our schools has the potential to save lives and change hearts. An effective SRO protects the innocent, facilitates dialogue to avoid and resolve disputes, brings different groups together, encourages, mentors, disciplines, and leads by example.

I worry that this decision keeps another possible truth – that an SRO is your friend - from our students simply to spare them the uncomfortable transition from being fearful, wary adolescents to becoming confident, responsible, civic minded adults who will one day treat policemen, firemen, soldiers and first responders with the gratitude and appreciation that they deserve.