



**Testimony Re: House Bills H7898 - Relating to Education -- Health and Safety of Pupils**

**House Education Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice our concerns with House Bill H7898.**

In the wake of absolute tragedy that has impacted our community through acts of gun violence, it is incredibly important to ensure horrific tragedies do not plague our communities again. All students need safe and supportive classroom environments and after school programs to progress academically and developmentally, and this effort needs to include strategies that enhance school climate. We support ensuring our schools are safe for all students. **We are concerned with House Bill 7898 and the proposal to install weapons detection systems at all schools.**

Weapons detection systems, like metal detectors, in schools were a byproduct of our country's "tough on crime" era. Since then, research has found that increasing school safety starts with improving school climate, meeting the behavioral and emotional needs of students, and moving away from school hardening tactics. There is a lack of evidence in the literature that metal detectors increase school safety or decrease school violence. While metal detectors and other weapons detection systems provide a visual sense of security, their presence is associated with perceived negative school climates and can negatively impact student and staff perceptions of safety in their schools.

We understand the intent of this bill and recognize that the need for protections against the pervasive harms of gun violence is greater now more than ever. [In the U.S., firearms are the leading cause of death among children and youth ages one to 19, surpassing motor vehicle deaths.](#) American children and youth are 21 to 23 times more likely to be killed by a gun than their peers in other high-income countries. However, [researchers have investigated methods for eradicating school shootings perpetrated by young people and concluded that one of the best strategies was to prevent young people from gaining access to firearms in the first place.](#) The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends public policies to protect children from gun injuries and violence through safe firearm storage and bans on assault weapons.

Additionally, there is the cost of installing multiple weapons detection devices in each school, hiring personnel to operate them, training on how to operate them, maintenance fees, all for a security method with high failure rate. Weapons detection devices like metal detectors impose a significant financial cost, have little to no evidence of increased safety or decreases in school violence, and increase negative perceptions among students about the safety of their school environments.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and voice our concerns. Again, we understand the intent of this bill and know that we are all aligned with the desire to provide all students with equal opportunities to receive an **equitable, adequate, meaningful education in a safe environment**. We believe this bill will revert us back to tough on crime era policies that were ineffective and caused more harm to learning environments than they intended to.