

## Steven Sepe

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**From:** Ashley H <herreraashley514@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 14, 2022 4:29 AM  
**To:** House Finance Committee  
**Subject:** HB-8310 Testimony- From A Providence Student

Hello,

My name is Ashley Mantanico I am from Paul Cuffee Upper school and I am currently a Junior. As a person who was born and raised from here and went through all the public school systems in providence, I am here to write to you on how it is really like within the system.

For a lot of you, it is easier to speak on such an impactful situation without being affected. You go back and forth with your fellow political leaders to discuss the safety issue with police officers in the school. You do this because you claim to want to do better for the community and help out. I am here reinstate the fact that the only way to help a community is to listen and enforce the laws the people within that community see most fit. The people impacted by these laws being debated are the most fit to speak on what they think is better for their community because they are the ones experience go the effects daily. As people in positions of power it is crucial to know when to speak and know when to listen.

As I stated, I am a student who is from these systems and I have witnessed the people I grew up with be assaulted and discriminated by the hands of the police in our schools. As a student I am tired of having a school meeting discussing the school shootings that occur and who has died from them. As a student I am exhausted in seeing my providence community in the news be discriminated time and time again by these same police officers you let in our buildings. As a student, it is incredibly frustrating to know that there is a higher percent chance that black and brown students are targeted/assaulted by the police. It is hurtful that I have to worry about my brothers and sisters, who go to these schools, not knowing if they are safe or not. Not knowing if they are receiving the proper help they need.

Which is why I urge you to oppose House Bill 8310. Adding more police in schools comes up in the wake of every school shooting, and it seems to be the thing politicians always attempt to pass. Now 14 million students are in schools with a School Resource Officer (SRO) and no school psychologist, social worker, or nurse. Many believe that placing SROs in schools can do more than enforce the law, like building trust with the student body and connections to law enforcement at an early age. But, even if we want our SROs to play multiple roles in our schools, many cops do not get into the profession to become counselors.- They signed up to enforce the law. Even when they are assigned to schools, SROs receive very little training around how to support students' emotional well-being.

Adding more SROs in our schools means they will be leaned on even more for basic discipline, which is a dangerous and punitive form in response to normal student behaviors. Police can and do arrest children and youth. Having more police in our school takes us further from restorative practices and strengthens the school to prison pipeline. In Providence there were 230 arrests in 2016-2019 in public schools, and over one-third of all arrests were for disorderly conduct (37%).

We need people well equipped to address our needs, we need more Counselors and social workers in our buildings instead of cops. We also need more BIPOC counselors to make us students feel more represented and understood. Studies show that the more representation there is for students, the better the learning environment for us.

Once again we need counselors NOT cops.

You see the statistics and there are many more. By enforcing this bill you are upholding racist and oppressive structures that criminalize and inflict violence on my fellow school peers. You are also causing more worry and distrust with the families of these students who send their kids off to school not knowing whether they will be 100% safe. These are the people who keep Rhode island running and by not addressing or solving the issue, you are dismissing and sending out the message that you truly do not care for the community.

We can't let history repeat itself. After each school mass shooting, the response to valid safety concerns is to add police, security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to school. It's a reactive approach that continues to fail our young people and families. We need to train our adults and invest in our families. We need to fund our schools much more to create a safer and better environment for us students to thrive in.

With solidarity,

Ashley Mantanico