

June 14, 2022

Testimony in Opposition to HB 8310

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Chanda Womack, and I am writing as a product of the Providence public school system, a community organizer, an executive director of an education justice organization, a resident of Providence, and a mom of a rising pre-k student, in strong opposition to this harmful bill.

The policing of our schools does not translate into safety, particularly for our Black and brown students. All of the empirical research has demonstrated that police officers in schools do not contribute positively to school culture and/or climate; in fact the presence of these officers have resulted in the disproportionate profiling and criminalization of students of color and contributes to the school to prison to deportation pipeline. As an executive director of an education justice organization who has been part of a larger coalition advocating for restorative justice practices, I have to assume that none of the sponsors of this bill have done their research at the local or national level. If they did, they would know that having SROs in schools is farthest from the humanizing practices and policies we need. Our coalition actually has a 70 page report that is rooted in research and centers evidence-based approaches that fuel positive, affirming, and restorative school communities. I am asking you all and all those interested in thinking about safety differently to read this report and to engage with young folks who have been leading this work for the past 3 years.

As a parent of a Black boy that is potentially entering the public school system, I refuse and will fight against any policy/ies that seek to shift learning institutions into a carceral state. We really need to reflect on how bills like HB 8310 actually work against “school safety,” if safety means mimicking the practices of prisons than that is not a school I want my son learning in.

Lastly, I ask that you center the voices of those most impacted by this issue, and that means voices of young people. The students who are in the schools and who continue to name time and time again that they need counselors and social workers who can support their holistic health and restorative practices that center their minoritized identity markers and their humanity.

Thank You

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