

June 14, 2022

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Dalton Maldonado, and I am a community member, Roger Williams Law student, and intern at the Rhode Island Center for Justice. I am writing to oppose House Bill No. 8310, which mandates that at least two school resource officers be placed at every public school in Rhode Island.

Research indicates that a policy of increasing police presence in schools may have several negative impacts, with limited benefits. Specifically, statistics show that schools with a police presence have higher arrest and suspension rates.¹ However, statistics do not show that schools with police officers have improved student safety or reduced crimes.²

Tragically, recent history is filled with instances where police failed to prevent school shootings. For example, during the 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas, a 17-year-old suspect killed 10 people and wounded 13 before he surrendered to the police, despite the fact that the school had 2 officers stationed there. In three other prominent shootings in 2018 – Kentucky’s Marshall County High School in January; Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February; and Maryland’s Great Mills High School in March – “attackers stormed campuses despite the presence of armed guards. In each case, guards failed to stop the shooter from killing.”³ These and other examples highlight the unfortunate reality that stationed officers do not prevent school shootings from happening.

While an officer’s presence likely would not prevent a possible mass shooting, a guidance counselor’s presence might. The mental health and social issues that contribute to tragedies like mass shootings are well-documented.⁴ While police officers are not trained to address these issues, nurses, counselors, and other supportive professionals are.

Investing in these forms of student support, along with instituting broader restorative justice practices, is precisely what students organizing with the Providence Alliance for Student Safety have called for in their recent proposal.⁵ The youth of Providence have spoken – developing a clear plan for ensuring their safety and directly expressing what they need to feel secure. Rather than directing state resources towards “solutions” that have proven ineffective, why don’t we try listening to our students, and funding the services that actually keep them safe?

In light of these considerations, I urge you to vote no on H8310.

Thank you,
Dalton Maldonado

¹ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/6/23/21299743/police-schools-research>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/us/schools-police-resource-officers.html>

³ <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2022/do-armed-school-police-officers-prevent-shootings/>

⁴ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/school-shootings-by-country>

⁵ <https://upriseri.com/providence-alliance-for-student-safety-coalition/>