

14 June 2022



To Members of the House Committee on Finance:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Dr. Gislaine N. Ngounou, and I am the interim President and CEO of the [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#), a philanthropic organization based in Quincy, Massachusetts, a longstanding funder of various Rhode Island, education-based non-profits and initiatives. I also write to you as a former K12 educator and administrator and am reaching out today as you consider the amended language of *House Bill No. 8310*.

The amended language in H8310 requires that two School Resource Officers (SROs) be assigned to every public school, beginning Jul 1, 2022. While this amendment bill is supposedly intended to promote safety, it does not take into account the data and deeply rooted history of police in schools as laid out in the [We Came to Learn report by the Advancement Project](#). We know that school districts across the nation are working hard in being proactive, so that the violence of mass shootings such as the ones at Robb Elementary (TX), Sandy Hook (CT), and Columbine (CO), do not happen to other young people and educators. Many educators, young people, and communities understand the complexity of the issue and the dangers of simply increasing SRO and police presence in schools—especially without commensurate increases in the social support nets desperately needed. At the very least, context matters greatly. As you consider H8310 please also consider research that shows that having SROs in schools [does not lead to better safety](#), but rather, punitive disciplinary measures that affect students of color at higher rates than their white peers, contributing to our country's school-to-prison pipeline.

We know that all young people deserve to attend schools where they are safe, supported, and respected. If students do not feel safe, they cannot learn. It is critical for Rhode Island to be a model for other school districts in having an education system that invests in the safety and effectiveness of social and wraparound support measures that benefit all young people—especially our most vulnerable and too often criminalized populations.

The times we (young people, educators, and communities) find ourselves in can feel hopeless and we must continue centering all young people (especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian American young people) despite this feeling. We must interrogate and resist the urge to call for solutions that have done more systemic harm than good and turn our efforts and resources towards solutions that promote overall health, wellbeing, and community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and more importantly, for listening to young people and families who are leading efforts to achieve equity in their schools and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Ngounou'.

Dr. Gislaine N. Ngounou
Interim President & CEO