

To: House Finance Committee
FROM: Jeremy Lum, Rhode Island Center for Justice
DATE: June 13, 2022
RE: Testimony Against H-8310

My name is Jeremy Lum, and I am a community member and intern with the Rhode Island Center for Justice. I am testifying in opposition to H-8310, which calls for “two (2) school resource officers [to be] placed at every public school in the State of Rhode Island.”

I think it’s important to acknowledge that the proponents of this bill are acting from a very real and valid fear, and we share the common goal of keeping our schools and children safe. We are united as a community in finding solutions, but the solution proposed by H-8310 — which is neither evidence-based nor addresses the root causes of violence in our schools — will not achieve our goal. In fact, H-8310 poses a threat to our children, denying the years of research showing that SROs not only fail to keep our students safe, but actively harm and endanger them.

Recent studies show that “more people die in school shootings where an armed officer is present than when there isn’t.”¹ In addition, the recent school shooting in Uvalde is proof that police in schools fail to prevent school shootings. Uvalde had its own school district police department; the district spent \$435,270 this year on security and monitoring services alone.² These measures did not stop the gunman. Over 140 police officers arrived at the scene and stood idly for over an hour, despite the sound of gunshots being fired.³ This narrative of police negligence is not new, with the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as one example where an SRO hid rather than apprehending the school shooter.⁴

School shootings aside, school resource officers put our youth at significant risk on a day-to-day basis. The evidence shows that police, both in Providence and the U.S. widely, disproportionately criminalize Black, Indigenous, Latinx and students of color, as well as differently abled students.⁵ In Providence schools alone, there were over 230 arrests between the 2016-17 and 2019-20 school years, 65% of whom were boys of color. Meanwhile, Black students were targeted in 30% of all student arrests, while only making up 16% of the student

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<https://www.theviolenceproject.org/research/new-research-finds-armed-officers-increases-likelihood-of-mortality-at-school-shootings/>

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[https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/Uvalde-law-enforcement-expenses-school-shooting-17216129.ph](https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/Uvalde-law-enforcement-expenses-school-shooting-17216129.php)

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/03/us/uvalde-police-response.html>

4 <https://apnews.com/article/shootings-parkland-florida-school-shooting-bb5c5fe81cecb63886bd325b53b2e597>

5 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oZS1jQ8c0E7GqXH21v5BUaU1LLczXcz/view;>

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors>

population.⁶ There is no evidence that SROs improve student safety. Instead research shows that the majority of students feel unsafe with SROs.⁷ At the worst extreme, the police are known to physically traumatize students – in the US, there have been 152 documented assaults on students of color by police officers between 2007-2021.⁸

It is clear that SROs cannot be relied on during crises, and that they also create an unsafe and dangerous learning environment for students. There is simply no case for their presence on school campuses.

The resources spent on law enforcement could be much better used to invest in effective and evidence-based solutions that actually work, such as ending zero tolerance discipline models and funding mental health support and early interventions. Restorative justice is among the most promising solutions; The Providence Alliance for Student Safety has put together a 70-page proposal for restorative justice practices, which you can view [here](#), complete with explanations for what it is, how it works, and what budgetary changes are needed to execute this shift. Unlike traditional disciplinary systems, restorative justice doesn't take a punitive approach to school discipline, but rather a preventative approach that provides strategies for addressing the root causes of harm. When properly implemented, restorative justice has been shown to significantly reduce incidents of "misbehavior," create a safer classroom environment, and reduce racial disparities in school discipline. I urge you to vote no on H-8310.

Signed,
Jeremy Lum
RI Center for Justice

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6c61467e3c3ac8b9c44952/t/5fdaaaa079494d6aaf876077/1608166052217/CYCLE+Discipline+Report+Final+Dec+2020+%281%29.pdf>

⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oZS1jO8c0E7Gqhx21v5BUaU1LLczXcz/view>;

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.877.1653&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁸ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oZS1jO8c0E7Gqhx21v5BUaU1LLczXcz/view>