

June 14, 2022

Testimony of Jess Huetteman
In Opposition of H-8310
House Committee on Finance
June 14, 2022

Rhode Island House of Representatives
Finance
RI State House
Providence, RI 02904

Subject: Against – H 8310

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives Finance Committee:

My name is Jess Huetteman and I am a singer, educator, church choir director, and disability support person living in Providence, RI. I am writing to you in strong opposition of House Bill 8310, which calls for “two (2) school resource officers [to be] placed at every public school in the State of Rhode Island.” As someone who works with children and folks with disabilities, this bill is deeply disturbing to me. House Bill 8310 denies years of research showing that school resource officers (SROs) not only fail to keep our students safe, but actively harm and endanger them.

Furthermore, the recent and devastating shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, TX illustrated how police in schools fail to prevent school shootings. Uvalde had its own school district police department and spent \$435,270 this year alone on security and monitoring services. Over 140 police officers arrived at the scene and stood idly for over an hour, despite the sound of gunshots being fired.

School shootings aside, SROs put our youth at significant risk on a day-to-day basis. Evidence shows that police, both in Providence and the rest of the country, disproportionately criminalize Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and students of color, as well as disabled students. As someone who works with these populations, I am appalled that this house bill would be introduced, and I fear for my students’ and clients’ safety.

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 population. There is no evidence that SROs improve student safety. Instead, research shows that the majority of students feel unsafe with SROs. At the worst extreme, 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.

Though this bill stems from a valid fear, given the recent mass shooting in Uvalde, it is an ineffective and harmful way of attempting to keep our children safe. The research shows that police in schools do not keep students safe, and that is why I am vehemently opposed to House Bill 8310.

Sincerely,
Jess Huetteman