

June 13, 2022

Dear House Finance Committee,

My name is Lindsay Paiva and I am a Providence Public School teacher and Rhode Island resident. Please consider this written testimony as AGAINST bill H8310.

Police do not belong in our schools.. Full stop. More police does not increase the security or safety of our schools. The high number of disorderly conduct incidents at SRO schools compared to non-SRO schools is consistent with the belief that SROs contribute to criminalizing student behavior. Having an SRO at school significantly increased the rate of arrests for this charge [disorderly conduct] by over 100 percent even when controlling for school poverty.

Students with marginalized identities are at the highest risk of arrest. Black and Latino youth make up over 58% of school-based arrests while representing only 40% of public school enrollment. Students with disabilities represent only 12% of student enrollment, but 28% of students referred to law enforcement or arrested at school.<sup>1</sup>

Schools can already be hostile environments for LGBTQIA and gender nonconforming students of color. School policing further funnels them into a youth justice system where they are twice as likely to be arrested and detained for a nonviolent offense.<sup>2</sup>

ICE has used information about immigrant youth and alleged “gang affiliation” to detain young people. Information about alleged gang affiliation comes from local law enforcement who are often interacting with young people because they are stationed in schools.

After being arrested by school police officers, students face a myriad of collateral consequences that harm their future, their families and their communities including:

- loss of instructional time and course credits
- legal costs and court fees
- separation from family
- emotional trauma
- challenges to their immigration status
- loss of housing or housing assistance
- loss of employment

These consequences only exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities already entrenched in a justice system where Black youth are five times as likely to be incarcerated as their White peers.

Police simply do not belong in schools.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Z79ehIOjUrYYT6FhoVvqQITFQqgIn8-j/view?usp=sharing>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

I believe that money spent on SROs and increasing police presence in schools would be better spent on counseling and mental health supports for students or on additional teaching support with interventionists, teachers, or teacher assistants. As a teacher in Providence Public Schools, I have seen the ways in which a lack of mental health supports, counselors, support staff, and interventionists has detrimental effects on students on a daily basis.

Students do not need to be policed and surveilled. They need a loving, caring environment that supports them to thrive. Police do not belong in that environment.

As one youth organizer mentioned, "Instead of seeing police in schools, I would rather see:

- more teachers happy because they are getting paid more
- more counselors helping with trauma
- better buildings since my school doesn't have any windows
- better books and technology
- restorative justice
- better relationships

We don't have any of that. Putting more police officers isn't going to change the main problems in schools, it's just going to create more issues. We need a quality education, not handcuffs."<sup>3</sup>  
– Rachelle Scott, 17, Power U Center for Social Change, Miami

Young people, educators, parents, and community members have spoken out loudly and clearly about what they would like to see. I was named Providence Teacher of the Year this year in part because of my advocacy for student-centered policies that uplift the voices of our young people. More police in schools is harmful for our youth, our teachers, and our communities. Please do the right thing for our students and do NOT pass H8310 so we can begin to create the schools that our students deserve.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.