

Steven Sepe

From: Neha Basu <nbasu@centerforjustice.org>
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 1:24 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Written Testimony Opposing H8310

To the House Finance Committee:

My name is Neha Basu, and I am a lifelong Rhode Island community member and intern with the Rhode Island Center for Justice. I am writing to oppose House Bill 8310, which calls for “two (2) school resource officers [to be] placed at every public school in the State of Rhode Island.” I strongly urge you to **oppose** this bill.

Years of research show that SROs not only fail to keep our students safe, but actively harm and endanger them. This bill is *especially* problematic in the wake of the tragic shooting at Uvalde, which is only the most recent example of how 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. Over 140 police officers arrived at the scene and stood idly for over an hour, despite the sound of gunshots being fired. This, while upsetting, is also unsurprising, given **recent studies showing that “more people die in school shootings where an armed officer is present than when there isn’t.”** Criminal justice professor Jillian Peterson points out that the presence of an officer “was actually the number one predictor of the increase in casualties after the presence of an assault rifle.”

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. 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, 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.

Of course, the proponents of this bill are acting from a very real and valid fear. Despite our differences, we share a common goal: keeping children safe. I have faith in our shared vision of schools as sites of safety, belonging, and learning, rather than places that our students are scared to enter and parents are afraid to send them to in the mornings. And what the research shows is that police in schools do not keep students safe.

I implore you to work with the many local organizations implementing evidence-based solutions that actually work. 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.

Keeping children safe at school must be a priority. Increasing the presence of SROs *does not* accomplish this goal, but rather endangers it. I urge you to **oppose** House Bill 8310.

Signed,
Neha Basu

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Neha Basu (she/her)
Intern
Rhode Island Center for Justice
1 Empire Plaza, Suite 410
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: 401-491-1101
Fax: 401-228-6780

www.centerforjustice.org

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