



Parents Leading for Educational Equity  
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June 14, 2022

**Testimony Re: H-8310**

**AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION (Adds direct state support for costs associated with employing school resource officers.)**

**House Finance Committee**

Greetings members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Ramona Santos Torres, I am the executive director of [Parents Leading for Educational Equity \(PLEE\)](#). We are a grassroots, family advocacy organization fighting for equitable systems of care for families and children. On behalf of PLEE and the parents we represent, I want to express the **strongest opposition** to house bill H-8310 which among other things places a minimum of two School Resource Officers (SRO) at every public school in the State of Rhode Island. First, I would like to offer you some data about why this bill is harmful for Black and Brown students and their families in so many ways.

In Rhode Island, during the 2015-2016 school year (the most recent available year),

- Black students represented 8% of the student population but represented 23% of students referred to law enforcement and 23% of students with school-related arrests.
- Hispanic students represented 24% of the student population but represented 47% of students referred to law enforcement and 36% of students with school-related arrests.
- Students with Individual Education Plans represented 15% of the student population but represented 22% of students referred to law enforcement and 29% of students with school-related arrests.
- Students as young as 11 years old have been arrested, and students ages 11-13 account for about 19% of arrests.<sup>1</sup>

As we saw in Uvalde, police officers could not prevent the senseless death of 19 children and two teachers. Parents actually were able to get their babies out safer and faster than police did, so is our best response to protect children to go back to the things that do not work? Research has told us that instead of protecting children, they criminalize them. Data tells us very clearly that when students are arrested it increases the likelihood of future arrests, decreases the likelihood of completing high school and may result in long-lasting consequences including restricted eligibility for federal grants and student loans and barriers to college enrollment and employment.

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<sup>1</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6c61467e3c3ac8b9c449521/5fdaaaa079494d6aaf876077/1608166052217/CYCLE+Discipline+Report+Final+Dec+2020+%281%29.pdf>



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I know there is one thing we all have in common, we want to keep children and staff safe but H-8310 is not the solution. More police has never been the solution and it never will be. If you want to reimagine what safe and nurturing schools look like, we urge you to review the 70 page proposal by The Providence Alliance for Student Safety that can be found [here](#), which is comprehensive, based on restorative practices that can and will support safe and healthy school communities. This proposal created by young people offers us tangible and attainable ways to keep students and staff safe but let me be clear, this is not the only way. We need a comprehensive and broad set of strategies that include gun control, significant investment in our mental health systems and in social safety nets like housing, food, access to health insurance amongst other things.

As you can see, another way, a much better way is possible and as there is a community willing and able to partner with you to move this vision to a reality. We hope that today, you reject H-8310 and choose the better way to keep our children and school staff safe.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director  
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