



RHODE ISLAND WORKING FAMILIES PARTY

Representative Marvin Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee

Tuesday, June 14, 2022

Opposition to H-8310 – School Resource Officers

Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee,

Rhode Island Working Families Party writes in strong opposition to H-8310, which would require two school resource officers at every public school in Rhode Island.

In the face of these repeated national tragedies, we must protect all students. However, there is strong evidence locally and nationally to suggest that police in schools (“school resource officers”, or SROs) neither prevent the mass shooting situations at issue, nor make students safer on a day-to-day basis. On net, the presence of SROs at current levels—let alone at the increases proposed in this bill—generates additional circumstances of contact between youth and police, circumstances wherein student behavioral issues that would (or should) otherwise be handled by a school nurse, guidance counselor, or social worker instead lead to handcuffs. According to a national report by the Justice Policy Institute, schools with SROs saw five times as many arrests for similar behavior by students as schools that did not have the placements. Right here in Providence, a research report by the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education at Roger Williams University makes clear that Black and Brown students are arrested at rates significantly higher than the rest of the student population.

It also is debatable, even doubtful, that adding police into schools leads to additional safety even in the most dire circumstances. This unfortunate fact was tragically on display recently in Uvalde, TX, which had its own School District Police Department and where school police officers did little to mitigate the recent mass shooting there. A similar situation was true regarding the mass shooting at the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, FL in 2018.

Even those students who do not have run-ins with SROs lose out, as increasing ties between the education and criminal legal systems impacts school climate and diverts funding that could be used to improve our education system in proven ways. The House has already taken commendable, bold leadership on gun safety this session. Let’s build on this momentum by investing not in school police, but rather in the guidance counselors, nurses, and social workers who are trained specifically to support

students in difficult times. Given the underinvestment that our education system currently sees, we can't afford to drive additional precious resources into responses that are, at best, unproven.

While its heart is in the right place, H-8310 is unfortunately a misguided attempt at addressing the symptoms of gun violence in our society, rather than investing in addressing the root causes. We hope this Committee will heed the public concerns raised on this bill, and refocus on other ways to defend student safety.

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