

Dear Chair Abney and the House Finance Committee,

My name is Rachel Bishop and I'm a Providence resident, public health professional and community organizer urging you to oppose HB8310. School police officers do not keep children safe. This is not an opinion, but a fact supported by RI student experience and two decades of national research.

I share the feelings of urgency and fear animating so many adults. I am haunted by the sounds of parents finding their children murdered and the images of children covering themselves in their friends' blood to survive. It is precisely my deep desire to protect our children that drives me to turn to their experience as well as research to understand how we best keep them safe.

I understand that many people are looking toward police as the only image of community safety we have been presented. But we must address the root causes of school shootings and not repeat the mistakes that put them further in harm's way. We need to look at the real impact of police in schools.

We saw in Uvalde what we have known now for years: that armed, trained police in schools do not protect children from shooters. The Uvalde school district has its own police department and had conducted an active shooter training two months ago. And yet, the school district police chief on the scene and the city police who responded waited outside for over an hour while the shooter murdered 19 fourth graders and two teachers. The swiftest action the officers took was to mace and handcuff the few parents desperately trying to save their children.

Some might insist that this is an exception. But Uvalde reinforces the findings of [school safety research over the past two decades](#): well-resourced communities and violence-prevention strategies keep children safe in schools, not police. For example, a 2021 [study from Brown University](#) found that school police officers (known as student resource officers or SROs) do not prevent school shootings. Other studies have found that SROs in fact cause students considerable harm. SROs increase the use of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. In addition, they suspend, expel and arrest Black children at over twice the rate of White children. Rather than create a safe environment for students, they interrupt learning and funnel children, Black children in particular, into the school-to-prison pipeline.

This fits with what we have seen in Rhode Island: that SROs bully, assault, and traumatize young people at alarming rates, disproportionately harming students of color. A survey by the Providence Alliance for Student Safety found that 72% of Providence Public School District (PPSD) students feel unsafe with armed officers in schools. Black students make

up 15% of PPSD but make up 30% of PPSD arrests. Just this winter, an [SRO body-slammed and choked a 16-year-old](#) and then held him for hours without family contact or medical attention.

I urge you to listen to our youth leaders on the frontlines of this violence in schools. They are also asking us to oppose [HB8310](#). They are asking for more counselors and no police in schools. They are asking for more restorative justice practices and no surveillance. They are asking us for common sense gun control and public health violence prevention. Please don't repeat history. Please keep them safe.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Bishop, MPH