

Steven Sepe

From: Ricky Strickler <fstrickler@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 11:38 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: HB8310

Good afternoon - I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Ricky Strickler and I am a High School Special Education Teacher in Providence. I am writing you today in opposition to HB8310, which would require at least 2 School Resource Officers in every school in Rhode Island.

I want to first be clear that I both understand and appreciate the intent behind this Bill, which seeks to keep our students safe and protected while they learn. As a teacher who fears for my students' safety as well as my own, I could not agree more about the importance of this objective.

However, I must also be clear that my experience (and significant data/research) leads me to believe this safety will not be achieved by the presence of School Resource Officers. Throughout my career, I have worked in a number of schools, primarily in Philadelphia, as both a teacher and a counselor. What I have seen time and time again is that the schools who succeed in creating a safe learning environment are those that invest most heavily in direct academic and emotional supports for their students, not punitive disciplinary measures or police presence.

As a Special Education teacher, this issue is especially close to my heart, as the data shows it is students like those on my caseload, along with students of color, who will in fact be put most at risk by the presence of SRO's. I am not naive about the challenges we face in educating young people safely and effectively. As a teacher, in my career, I have had to stop people from entering school buildings they did not have a right to enter. I have had to break up fights. And, much more often, I have been able to talk students through their desire to start one. This is part of what I am trained to do.

I say this to say, when we invest in our young people in genuine ways - when we provide them with the resources they need to not only learn but, when needed, to heal, we can create truly safe learning environments for them in ways that the presence of police never can. This means using our resources to hire counselors, social workers, Special Ed teachers, and paraprofessionals, not SRO's.

If our primary concern is to keep anyone who wishes to do harm to children out of our schools, this can be addressed with a police presence *outside* of school buildings, thus allowing ALL students *inside* to feel safe and supported, not criminalized. I urge you to withhold support from this particular bill in favor of those that are more supported by both data and the experiences of students and teachers.

Thank you for your time, and have a great day.

Sincerely,
Ricky Strickler