

Steven Sepe

From: Seth Rockman <seth_rockman@brown.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 3:38 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Cc: Rep. Blazejewski, Christopher R.; Rep. Kislak, Rebecca M.
Subject: H8310: oppose

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to convey my strong opposition to H8310 and its proposal to station police— euphemistically called “School Resource Officers”— in every single Rhode Island school.

I approach this issue as the parent of a Providence Public School District middle schooler and as a professor of US history with a specialization on the history of race and slavery in America.

While it might seem like “hardening” schools is an appropriate response to the risk of deranged shooters entering the buildings, the fact of the matter is that there is no evidence (a) that the presence of officers has ever discouraged homicidal (and often suicidal) assailants from attacking a given target, and (b) that the presence of officers has ever limited the carnage that such shooters have inflicted on their targets. In other words, this is not actually a solution to the problem.

But worse, this proposal actually makes students less safe and works against the high-quality education we desire for all Rhode Island children. Militarizing our schools has worked conclusively to the detriment of students of color who find themselves surveilled and policed in spaces of learning, with the too-frequent acceleration of the schools-to-prisons pipeline. The only proven outcome of more SROs is more youth entangled in the criminal justice system, always to the detriment of college and career prospects.

If the legislature is keen to appropriate funds that will promote the long-term health and wellbeing of students, then it is unquestionably the case that we should be spending on counselors, mental health specialists, and social workers. I urge you to follow the research identifying the vast social benefits to increased mental health services and the vast social costs of militarized schools. To put officers into every single Rhode Island school is an enormous waste of money, runs counter to the desires of students, and subjects students— especially in places with a high concentration of students of color— to presumptive criminalization. I urge you to vote against this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Seth Rockman

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