

Steven Sepe

From: Tanya Creamer <tanyacreamer8@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 11:53 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Testimony Opposed to Bill H8310

Dear Chairman Abbey & members of the Finance Committee

I am emailing to submit my testimony in opposition of House Bill 8310. This bill supports funding for 2 School Resource Officers in all public Rhode Island schools beginning July 1, 2022. As a special educator who has worked with you with intellectual and developmental disabilities for the last 8 years in school districts across Rhode Island- I was appalled to read that this bill proposed SROs would only be required to have 40 hours of "specialized training" to be determined by the state police. With my extensive experience working with these youth- I cannot imagine anyone to be qualified to handle any level of youth in crisis, with only a week's worth of training and possibly no prior experience or understanding of students of differing abilities.

Our young people of all abilities deserve a positive and inclusive school environment and an engaged learning community that is safe, supportive and free of police officers who criminalize youth of differing abilities. We know that police traumatize our students, nationally from 2007 to now, there has been 174 recorded police assaults on students where a School Resource Officer tasered, pepper sprayed, injured, or otherwise used force on a student. I have seen instances of this first hand, I have watched a kindergarten student who was in a manic state be tackled and dragged out of the school into a police cruiser by an officer, I have watched a high school student be arrested and detained in isolation for 3 hours without any contact or comfort offered to them. I have seen an SRO scream at a non-verbal student for yelling because they cannot use words to express their emotions. I have seen these inept practices of SRO's at: East Providence High School, Goff Middle School, Shea High School, Barrington High School, Lincoln Middle and High School. I know that if we had more trained social workers, special educators and counselors in our schools, then these incidents would have been prevented.

I am worried for the future of my students with intellectual and developmental disabilities if there is a police presence in their schools. I worry for my non-verbal students, my students who elope, my students who have intense emotional responses. The evidence shows that police, in both our capital city of Providence and across the U.S. disproportionately criminalize differently abled students. My students with disabilities have already been through so much these past two years, I am concerned for their level of well-being everyday, and this concern has only been increased by the possibility of bringing in strange, untrained authoritative figures like SROs into their schools.

I urge you to reconsider Bill H8310 and to think about the consequences to our youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities if the part of the bill about School Resource Officers was to pass. I stand in agreement with the 70 page paper on restorative justice practices put together by the Providence Alliance for Student Safety and urge you to reconsider funding SRO positions because there are other, safer, more inclusive options out there.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tanya Creamer
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