

Good afternoon,

Hello, my name is Lounay Oliver-Camacho. I am a freshman at Mount Pleasant High School, and a youth advocate at Young Voices. I am here today to ask you all advocate for H6045, which would increase the amount of social workers in public schools and provide funding to them. Social workers are essential to the lives of thousands of students in Rhode Island, and I am living proof of that.

My first day of High School, I was completely unprepared, and was wearing what I had woken up with. I had no bookbag, pencils, notebooks, or even the energy to be in school. Nikki Bond, the school social worker came to me non-judgmentally, and supported me through one of the hardest days I've ever been through. Thanks to her knowledge and resources, within the week I had clothes, materials, and a new bookbag. It was her quick action, and unwavering

Nikki showed me that I was resilient, resourceful, and most importantly, not alone. She connected me to Young Voices to elevate my voice, and other programs that helped my growth. Without her, I am unsure where I would be today, but I know I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have the courage to speak to all of you, and I wouldn't be the advocate that I am today. Just one social worker was able to make that difference for me, but I know I'm just one of the lucky ones to experience this.

Most students in Rhode Island will not have similar stories, because there was no social worker that got to them in time. We cannot allow this to happen. Young people like myself deserve to have the support that they need in their schools, and we can't do that without ensuring that every school has the social workers needed to help their students. Please advocate today to pass H6045, make sure that no young person is left behind, because social workers save lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Lounay



