

Hello, my name is Sam Wallace. I am a Providence resident, previously a Providence Public School Librarian, and a volunteer with the Deportation Defense Network. I am submitting this testimony in support of both Senate bill S2278 and House Bill H7436 to prohibit Intergovernmental Service Agreements with ICE.

In my five years working for Providence Public Schools, I have been lucky to meet the incredible students and families who have immigrated to this country. I have been lucky to teach incredibly brave, smart, determined, kind, and empathetic young people to have experienced challenges I cannot imagine. These students come into our under-resourced schools, often without language support, sometimes coming into classrooms with subs or without teachers. I could go on and on about how much we need our local and state resources to be devoted to the health and safety of these students and families. What we do not need is continued investment in detention facilities.

When we choose to invest in places of violence like the wide detention center where human beings have died due to medical neglect, it shows our students that we only see them as criminals rather than as people. As educators, we know that humans cannot learn when our bodies need to focus on survival, and in fact, it is necessary if we want to improve our education in the state of Rhode Island, that we stop investing in places where private companies make money on human suffering, like the Wyatt. I have talked to students about their rights- what they should and shouldn't do if stopped by a masked stranger with a gun. They are scared to walk home. Families are scared to send kids to school. Attendance numbers are down- and these bills are a clear way to show Rhode Islanders that their fears are being heard, and taken seriously.

I remember one family at our school, where a parent was detained by ICE (of many families who are impacted). This family already had children in special education classrooms needing additional support; they deserved more English translation support than the school district was providing and, with the detention of a parent, was losing income while bills continued to come in. I worked with this student from 6th to 8th grade as their librarian and the gains this student made academically and socially were amazing! With a parent detained, our student was not able to fully celebrate their 8th grade graduation- a well-earned accomplishment. To know that this parent, instead of celebrating their child, is held at an abusive detention center after already sacrificing so much to build a life in this country, is a shame on all Rhode Islanders.

We should invest in the health and safety of all Rhode Islanders, and officials can do that now by ending ICE contracts. As a volunteer for the deportation defense line, I have talked to hundreds of Rhode Islanders about their feelings regarding ICE. Rhode Islanders are scared- folks feel they will be racially targeted. Driving to work requires a check-in with loved ones to know if you made it safe, regardless of one's citizenship status. We know ICE has detained folks leaving court appointments- "following the process", if you will, and Rhode Islanders want investment in our people, not in ICE contracts. I urge all to support this House Bill to prohibit Intergovernmental Service Agreements with ICE and stand with all Rhode Islanders.