

*VIRTUAL COURT TESTIMONY 4/9*

My name is Maia, and I am a freshman at Brown University. I am testifying in support of the RI HB8328 bill, establishing virtual court hearings in order to protect our community from ICE kidnappings. Every week I stand outside the Garrahy Courthouse, watching for ICE vehicles and speaking to people on the street about the ongoing presence of ICE in our own community. Each time, they are surprised to hear that people are taken from the courthouse nearly every week. This pandemic of terror needs to stop now. By instituting virtual court hearings, we have a chance to make a real difference in the cruelty that is actively ripping apart our community.

I am from Washington DC, and throughout high school I worked as a docent at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Contrary to popular expectation, the longest part of our permanent exhibit is not actually the camps, or the mass tragedy of death brought on by the Nazi parties. Instead, the longest part of our exhibit is the beginning: the emergence of fascism and Hitler's rise to power. We tell our visitors at length about the many political tensions in post-war Germany, the steady increase in police presence, and the fear that was ever growing in German cities. This history is deeply engrained into my brain, from years of teaching it to others and the deep burden of carrying it with me.

The terror we see on American streets today is eerily similar to the start of our exhibit. We are seeing innocent people being kidnapped on the streets, put into cages, and disappearing into detention centers with no transparency and terrible conditions. There are people literally hiding in homes in Minneapolis. As I stand on the corner of the Garrahy Courthouse searching for ICE vehicles passing by, there is a visceral sense of fear. With Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) quickly approaching next week, I have been reflecting on the importance of knowing this history. It is our duty to take the lessons learned from such an intensely tragic institutional genocide, and use them to change the world around us. We learn history to prevent it from repeating itself – let today be one of those moments. The court is meant to be a place of justice and democracy, yet it is being exploited for cruel and inhuman abductions of our own community members. As ICE continues to terrorize our streets, it is up to state legislators to stand up for our rights.