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State of RI General Assembly
82 Smith
Providence, RI 02903

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill S2280

Chair LaMountain and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Matthew Boucher, and I respectfully submit this written testimony in support of Senate Bill S2280. Although I am unable to attend the hearing in person, I appreciate the opportunity to provide my perspective for the record. I would also like to note that I do not live in Rhode Island anymore, but I do continue to work in Rhode Island, both as an adjunct instructor at Rhode Island College and in private practice, therefore this bill does impact my work directly. I would also like to thank the people who have sponsored this bill for the work they are doing on this matter.

The recent tragic events in Rhode Island undeniably show the importance of strong emergency preparedness and coordinated response planning, especially in situations with heightened vulnerability. As you are aware, in December 2025, a gunman opened fire inside an engineering classroom at Brown University, killing two students and injuring nine others during final exams. Just two months later, in February 2026, another tragedy struck our state when a shooter opened fire during a high school hockey game at Dennis M. Lynch Arena in Pawtucket, killing multiple people and injuring several others while students, families, and community members were present. In addition, I have a personal experience that was not listed in the media.

On 6/25/2025 I was teaching a class in the Foreman Center, at Rhode Island College. At around 7:00 pm we heard what sounded like gunfire. As a result, I called the campus security, who had to wait until the Providence Police arrived, which took about 10 minutes. This delay is directly related to campus police not being allowed to be armed. Although the incident was later dismissed as fireworks, it certainly highlighted the lack of preparedness for such an incident. Ten minutes could have made the difference in many people's lives had that been an active shooter. I also would like to highlight, as a secondary issue, the reason I moved out of Providence (after living there for 12 years) was due to increased gunfire and lack of timely response. The final incident for me was when there were 22 gunshots fired on my street, Herschel Street, which is walking distance from the school.

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These events demonstrate that emergencies can occur without warning in places and that we cannot continue to operate from a reactionary place. We need to start to increase proactive responses. One simple solution I would like to recommend would give the staff the ability to lock classrooms of buildings, in case of an emergency. Although this is not a solution, it would create another barrier. Classrooms with expensive equipment are often locked, because they are assets. I would suggest the biggest assets to any school are the students and the staff and if we cannot protect them, we are doing a huge injustice to the community.

Senate Bill S2280 reflects a proactive and reasonable intervention requiring schools to maintain up-to-date emergency response plans and ensure that first responders have immediate access to buildings and grounds during emergencies.

These requirements encourage communication and coordination between schools, local law enforcement, and emergency services before a crisis occurs rather than forcing responders to make decisions without critical information during a rapidly evolving situation. Equally important is the bill's requirement that safety plans be reviewed and updated regularly. School buildings change, personnel change, and best practices in emergency management evolve. A safety plan that is outdated or inaccessible to first responders can slow response times when every second matters.

Considering the tragedies that have recently affected Rhode Island communities, preparedness and coordination are not abstract policy ideas but real safeguards that can help protect students, educators, and families. Senate Bill S2280 represents a practical and responsible step toward strengthening those safeguards.

Thank you for your time, your service to the people of Rhode Island, and your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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