



**Testimony Re: House Bill 6149: School Resource Officers**  
**House Committee On Finance**  
**April 26, 2023**  
**Paige Clausius-Parks, Executive Director**

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice our **opposition** to House Bill 6149 which would reimburse a school district or municipality for the employment of newly hired school resource officers.

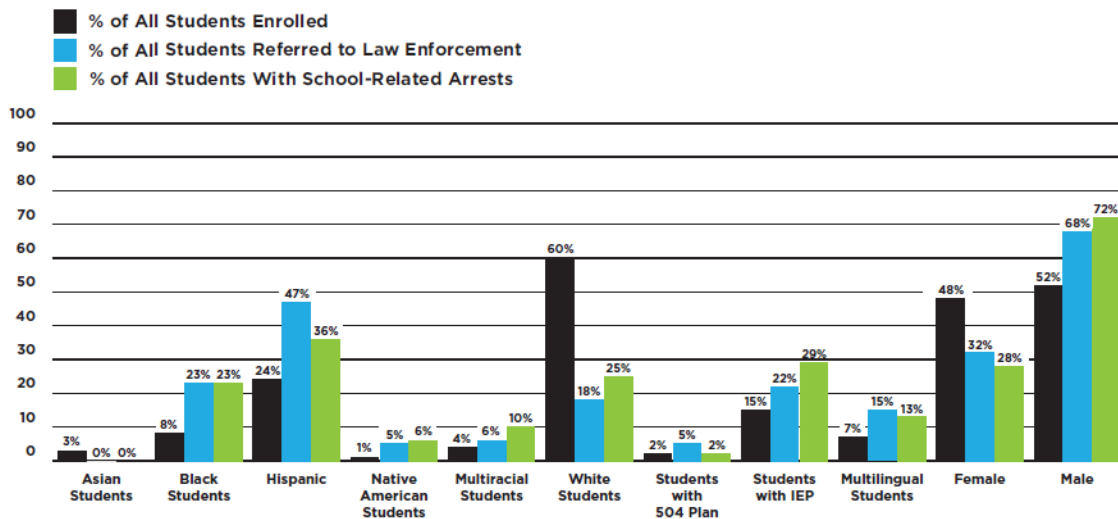
According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2019, there were 24,900 sworn School Resource Officers (SRO) despite limited evidence of their effectiveness in making school safer. Research has also shown the link between the presence of SROs and student behavior patterns and their consequences. **While school police do mitigate some types of violence in schools, national research suggests the presence of law enforcement worsens school climate, increases disciplinary actions, and disproportionately impacts the academic outcomes of Students of Color.**

School climate is the character and quality of life within a school building and is defined by several indicators including the relationships among students, teachers, families, and the broader community; safety; facilities; the availability of school-based health supports; discipline policies; and academic outcomes. **A positive school climate promotes social, mental, emotional, behavioral, and learning success while also ensuring physical and social safety.**

In Rhode Island, during the 2015-2016 school year (the most recent available year),

- Black students represented 8% of the student population but represented 23% of students referred to law enforcement and 23% of students with school-related arrests.
- Hispanic students represented 24% of the student population but represented 47% of students referred to law enforcement and 36% of students with school-related arrests.
- White students represented 60% of students enrolled but represented only 18% of students referred to law enforcement and 25% of students with school-related arrests.
- Students with Individual Education Plans represented 15% of the student population but represented 22% of students referred to law enforcement and 29% of students with school-related arrests.

**Bias in School Discipline by Race/Ethnicity, Special Education Status,  
English Proficiency, and Gender, Rhode Island, 2015-2016**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2016 school year.

Student arrest and juvenile detention increases a student's likelihood of future arrests, decreases the likelihood of completing high school and may result in long-lasting consequences, including restricted eligibility for federal grants and student loans and barriers to college enrollment and employment.

Enclosed is our report, [\*Policies and Practices Supporting Student-Centered Learning in Rhode Island: School Climate\*](#). This report uses an equity lens to look at policies, practices, and measures of school climate, including student mental and behavioral health and suggests actions Rhode Island can take to ensure that all students, particularly Students of Color, low-income students, differently-abled students and Multilingual Learners, are in schools that prioritize strong relationships between students and educators and promote excellent, equitable learning while also ensuring student safety and emotional well-being. We urge you to support proven methods of creating safe and supportive educational environments, including investing in restorative justice practices and mental health providers and to vote against this bill which would have a negative effect on school climate, likely result in an increase in disciplinary actions and arrests, and have a disproportionately negative effect on Students of Color and students receiving special education services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.