



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 5628- Categorical Funding for School Security
House Finance Committee

April 26, 2023

Paige Clausius-Parks, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman 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 **elements** House Bill 5628. This bill would establish a new categorical funding category to reimburse school districts up to one-half the cost of funding school security infrastructure, School Resource Officers, and walking school bus programs.

School climate is the character and quality of life within a school building and is defined by several indicators including safety. **A positive school climate promotes social, mental, emotional, behavioral, and learning success while also ensuring physical and social safety.** Schools that build trusting relationships between students and educators, increase access to mental health professionals, and create partnership with community-based organizations are more likely to have positive school climates.

According to the *American Institutes for Research*, reasonable improvement to physical security measures can also support a safe environment including, ensuring doors are locked and installing better intercom systems for communicating threats can improve school safety.

School safety is a responsibility we all play a part in. However, it is critical we strike a balance between the physical safety of schools and preventing punitive policies like the use of metal detectors, increased use of out-of-school suspensions for non-violent offense, and the hiring of School Resource Officers, which have been shown to exacerbate inequities and alienate Students of Color — all things that should be considered in this bill, so we aren't creating problems we are all working hard to prevent.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

