

HB6029 - SUPPORTING

My name is Marco Lima and I'm a sophomore at Times 2 Stem Academy. I'm also a member of Young Voices. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill number 6029. This bill if passed will benefit all students in Rhode Island especially those who are a part of a marginalized community. I attend a school who has student counselors as the main resource for students as we do not have any SRO's. While many believe that SRO's help students achieve a better working environment this is sadly not the case. Instead of being able to successfully end altercations or other issues faced in the student body we see SRO's abuse their power time and time again. In my school instead of considering the idea of SRO's we have social workers who work tirelessly to see the root of the issue and achieve a permanent solution to the issue. By doing this my school removes the chance of causing bystander students trauma by seeing their friends getting brutally pushed or "punished".

Like many students, I have seen students fighting but unlike other schools in Rhode Island we solved this issue by having the counselors listen and try to understand why this occurred. This also effectively prevented these students from having a similar issue occur as she was able to guide them through any issues and what preventative measures the student could take. Although this bill doesn't guarantee the introduction of social workers if we do go that root this would help all students because they would have a mental health professional available to guide them through personal issues outside of school. As we know the pandemic has amplified many societal issues like depression and social anxiety. Unlike SRO's, social workers are key in the fight against these serious issues. One of the strongest abilities of social workers is that they learn how to de-escalate situations. For example when talking about school shootings, there are more cases of social workers being able to calm down the shooter compared to SRO's helping in even stopping the shooter. Not to mention the times where SRO's have RAN away from the school during a shooting when their main purpose is to "protect" the students.

Thank You,
Marco Lima

HB6029 - SUPPORTING

Good afternoon,

My name is Layla and I'm a 9th grader at Blackstone Academy Charter School. I'm also a member of Young Voices. I am here today to testify in support of Bill H 6029. This Bill will assist all students in Rhode Island, more specifically those who are diminished based on race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Being young already carries its own stresses as it is and having an intimidating person carrying a gun around our schools shouldn't have to be another added worry. How can we as students focus on our studies and getting an education if we have to fear for our lives? School is supposed to be a place of safety for youth. A place where we know we are loved and protected. Keeping School Resource Officers is sentencing us to a prison scattered with overdue math homework and #2 pencils. There is such a huge need for social workers in schools. As a student that has been in a school building with an SRO and also social workers, I've always found the latter to be a lot more of use.

Thank you for your time today,

Layla Charron

HB5827 - SUPPORTING

Good afternoon,

My name is Gretta Schaaf and I'm the Deputy Director at Young Voices RI. I am writing today to show my support for House Bill 5827. Data can be a powerful tool that helps us understand issues and fight against long-standing inequities in our schools and communities. I believe it's extremely important for RIDE and the Department of the Attorney General to communicate and coordinate their efforts to collect data concerning the use of force, arrest, and referrals to law enforcement or courts. Without this coordination and access to public data, we are not serving our youth fairly and justly. We must do better. Every student deserves the right to a safe learning environment. Please pass this bill so we can build a better school system together that promotes equality, safety, and justice for everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gretta Schaaf (She/her/hers), Young Voices RI

HB5827 - SUPPORTING

Good Evening,

My name is Cheyenne Gregory and I'm a member of Young Voices RI. I'm writing this testimony to show my support for the House Bill 5827. I believe that recording the use of force and arrests could provide important data that can be used to show the lack of necessity for police force in Schools. The recording of force, arrest, and referrals will create concrete data that cannot be ignored. It can uncover biases that went ignored or unnoticed before and it will create a safer environment for students to grow and learn. This bill's passage can uncover more opportunities for growth within the police force and education department. This bill will help push for justice and safety for all students in R.I.

Best of wishes,

Cheyenne Gregory, Grade 9, Blackstone Valley Prep

HB5827 - SUPPORTING

Good Evening,

My name is Nitzalis Cabrero and I am a member of Young Voices RI and a freshman at Blackstone Valley Prep. I'm writing this testimony to show my support for the House Bill 5827. I believe that having the necessary data and footage of the use of force and arrests with SROS will bring justice and safety for all POC students.

Thank you for taking the time to read and please keep our words in mind!

Nitzalis Cabrero, Grade 9, Blackstone Valley Prep (Any Pronouns)

HB5211 - SUPPORTING

Good afternoon,

My name is Melanie Nunez Ortiz, I am a long time participant in Young Voices, a nonprofit organization stationed in Rhode Island that's helping youth expand outside of the labels put upon them by society. As a young BIPOC woman, I am seen as having to be quiet, obedient, and never step out of line, especially with men and those older than me, and I was those things for a long time. Coming into Young Voices I could remove those labels and replace them with strong, leader, mentor, and so much more, simply because I was given the space to not only see more in myself, but have someone else see it too. With the help of their summer workforce program, involving resume building and mock interviews, and leadership training academy, involving public speaking opportunities and meetings with public officials, I have transformed. I no longer will allow myself or others be restricted by those social labels. Our state benefits from our work so our state should aid in that process with allocating 2 million dollars into the budget for effective afterschool programming. Show us that you care and respect us enough to help us in this process of transforming into the people confident enough to take over one day. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Melanie E. Nunez Ortiz

Young Voices Board Co-Chair

Young Voices Staff Member, Young Voices 4-year Participant

Classical High School Senior

HB5211 - SUPPORTING

Good afternoon,

My name is Marleni Suazo, and I am a Program Coordinator with Young Voices, a nonprofit organization that amplifies youth voices across the state of Rhode Island. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill no. 5211. When you read this letter, the first thing you see is my name and title, but I'm more than that; I have roots that run deep through the Providence community. This young lady grew up in the Southside of Providence, attending almost every public school in the city. My whole life I wondered "what is my purpose in life" and "what do I want to be when I grow up" as any kid who was taught to think 10 years ahead. It wasn't until my sophomore year of high school afterschool opportunities started to knock on my door, from Providence Student Union, Youth In Action, and Young Voices. It was those afterschool programs that inspired me to continue the work in my community, still, 7 years later there is a lack of resources and funds to support afterschool programs. Support programs that always go the extra mile to fully prepare youth for the workforce world. Please vote YES for House Bill No. 5211 and extend the promise of equity to all young adults in our state.

Sincerely,

Marleni M. Suazo

Young Voices Program Coordinator

RIC Alumni 19'

Hope High School Alumni 15'