

In support of Bill H7545

Hello, my name is Brittany and I am a student at Rhode Island college studying to become a social worker. I am here today in support of Bills H7545. Although passionate about my studies, I do not stand before you as a student but instead as a person who was once a struggling adolescent. Had intervention been provided for me through a social worker as early as elementary school, certain hardships and traumas could have easily and effectively been prevented throughout my childhood.

After growing up with years of violence and neglect, I left home at 18 before graduating high school which resulted in me being considered legally homeless. The high school I attempted to transfer to refused to accept me due to my homelessness status. It was a social worker within that school system who advocated for me and fought for my right to education and graduation. Without her, I would not have my high school diploma let alone be a college graduate. I will never forget the impact of that woman's compassion and dedication to me and the way she made me feel seen, validated, and thankful to be alive.

I am overwhelmed with both gratitude and grief. Gratitude to each person who sat with me in my pain and created spaces for me to keep living. And grief for all the children right now, who do not have access to the resources that they so rightfully deserve. It easily could have been too late for me had social workers not seen me and advocated for my survival.

I could go on to share many stories of those who have helped me but how can I speak of hope when our children are still suffering, just as I once was. Too many of these children will not get the privilege of sharing an inspiring and beautiful story of hope and humanity because no one is there to witness and sit with them in their pain. These children are right in front of us, begging to be helped.

Social workers are the reason that I am alive and speaking before everyone in this room today. I was one of the lucky ones. There are children right now who will not be as lucky due to our current student to social worker ratio. Social workers are burning out from unmanageable and overloaded caseloads within our school systems. This does not have to be our reality. We can choose to save our children and future generations by investing in social workers within our schools. I left Rhode Island at 18 and got the help I needed in a different state within a school system that properly utilized their resources through social workers. Let us do that for our children so that stories like mine become the norm instead of the exception.

Thank you.