

In Support of H6029

My name is Nicole Rabe, and I am a Providence Public School Student. Currently, I go to Classical High School, but I am an alumni of Roger Williams Middle School. I am a member of Providence Student Union, I am passionate about art and ending mental health stigma.

Personally, last year I struggled with my mental health, and it was rooted throughout my experience in Providence Public Schools. The system allowed for me to experience bullying from elementary school to middle school, and I felt like no one was listening or were there to talk. I felt isolated and I felt like there was nothing in my power, I transferred elementary schools thinking it would be a better alternative but it was the same exact social patterns and lack of support. The experience I had through middle school, made it hard for me to excel in high school, and socialize. The only place I have felt supported to be myself is through the free art programs offered in our city, such as CityArts and New Urban Arts. But, the reality is I should be able to feel supported and respected by the community at my school. In order for this to happen. We need to have more mental health staff and resources for students like myself. I want to prevent other students from feeling this way, not only was it interfering with students' academic performance before the pandemic, but it's been an ongoing issue and weakness of our district. This is something we need to change.

I support this bill because I would like every student to have the opportunity to express their emotions and get support from their school. The data shows that 1 in 5 youth develops diagnosable mental health needs, and 1 in 10 youth will require additional mental health supports from schools. We need students to receive active support to better their wellbeing and in turn the overall wellbeing of the community. Schools should be providing support for not only their students but also their teachers. We do not only need more mental health staff to make this possible, we need more staff that look like us and reflect our backgrounds.

We need the time to create bonds and trust with our social workers and counselors. When support staff is way below the recommended ratio, it is hard for them to put enough time and effort into every student that needs their help. We need more support and resources for mental health related challenges and this bill is a step in the right direction, it has my full support.