

Greetings Judiciary Committee,

My name is Anais, I am a junior at William E Tolman High School and a youth advocate at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am writing this testimony against Bill H5262, which would add school superintendents, central office officials, school principals, and all other school employees to the definition of a "public official" for purposes of criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials. I believe it should not be passed.

I think this law is harmful because it does not take into account people with conditions such as autism, who may appear aggressive in situations that are not comfortable for them. In addition, we should avoid allowing for the vague language of this bill to lead to accusing black people of being aggressive when they are not, favoring racist stereotypes. I also believe that public officials have power over students because of their age and their position, and passing this law can encourage them to abuse their power and apply their ideals that may go against the rights of minors and humans. I think this law should not be passed because I have been a teenager with mental health problems and I know that adolescence is a difficult stage of life and having mental health problems makes it more difficult. I have been around teenagers like me and I know how susceptible they are to reacting in a way that may seem aggressive in situations, and I think that instead of punishing them with jail for this, they should be offered support so that they can improve their mental health and understand that schools are a safe space for all people, regardless of their age, mental health, skin color, sex or sexual orientation. In addition, it is known that Black and Latino people suffer more discrimination and can feel excluded in schools by staff. This law would make them feel even more discriminated against and isolated, because it would give support to racist people to make an accusation against them. Schools have to be a safe place to learn, socialize and develop as a person. We should all help to be able to favor this and do our part to make it so. We must always look out for the

mental health and well-being of everyone and the way to do this is not by punishing with jail, but by hiring more social workers, psychologists and counselors for schools. Having adults who can guide students and make them feel safe, included, and who can give them tools to have good mental health. I would not like this law to be passed for the sake of all students and teenagers.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Anais.