

Good afternoon Judiciary Committee,

My name is Angie, I am an 11th grader at Classical High School and a youth advocate at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am testifying 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 the criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials.

I believe this bill is harmful because the vague language in it can cause harm towards communities that are already impacted by racial disparities. “Threats” can be loosely interpreted. Many public officials and other people in power can take advantage of this and impose harm, such as imprisonment or a \$5,000 fine to youth and their families for common misunderstandings. “Hostility” can be easily misinterpreted based on how someone looks, their race, sex, or culture. As a person of color, and as a young woman, I know I’ve been targeted in the past due to my identities. Such an extreme punishment should not be taking place in schools, where we are still learning how to become adults, manage our emotions, and communicate.

I urge you to listen to the youth who will one day in the future, be in your positions. Who shouldn’t be oppressed and treated unfairly because of the stereotypes that already harm them everywhere they go. Who should be able to go to school, and feel safe to be themselves, and sometimes make mistakes, without throwing their whole life away.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Angie Penafiel