

Good afternoon Judiciary Committee,

My name is Lounay, I am a 9th grader at Mount Pleasant High School and a youth advocate at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence. I am testifying against Bill H5262, which would add school employees to the definition of a “public official” for purposes of the criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials.

As a young person in school, I have struggled often, being misunderstood and seen as threatening for trying to explain myself. Not too long ago, a teacher tried to state that I threatened them after we got into a small argument. I had told him I wanted my grandma to speak with him directly, but he took that as a threat that my grandma would do something to him. Misunderstandings like these happen often in my school, and I don't want something like this hurting people like me.

This bill is vague and easy to misinterpret. You can take anything as a threat, and young people like me who are already targeted can be targeted further. I've been told that the way I dress, look, and speak is threatening. That my hair looks “aggressive” and “inappropriate.” We can't allow for the discrimination that people like me face daily to impact our lives so negatively in the places where we are supposed to feel safest, like school. I know that this bill will target my community, that worlds will be altered, lives forever disrupted by small mistakes. Please take my experience, and that of many of my peers into consideration. Please do not pass H5262.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Lounay