

Good afternoon Judiciary Committee,

My name is Mariah Ajiboye, I am a 12th grader at Classical High School and a youth advocate at Young Voices, an afterschool program in Providence, RI. I am here today to testify 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.

This bill is harmful due to its loose and vague language. People of color in schools have been shown to be seen as threatening by staff due to historical and painful stereotypes. With this bill in place, schools will become more discriminatory and young people will quickly fall into the school to prison pipeline. I can see this bill impacting specially Multilingual Learners, who are already struggling to communicate in schools that do not understand them, and their words can be easily misconstrued. Differences in culture, race, sex, and ethnicity can all make us seem “hostile” towards others, all based on harmful stereotypes that continue to hold us back. It is imperative that we do not make schools another space where youth like me do not feel safe to speak up for themselves, or make minor mistakes, due to fear of imprisonment.

I hope you’ll take my experience into consideration and vote no on H5262. This bill does not benefit anyone except those who will misuse it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Mariah Ajiboye