



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Rhode Island



ARISE

February 4, 2026  
VIA EMAIL

Barrington School Committee  
Barrington Middle School  
261 Middle Highway  
Barrington, RI 02806

Dear School Committee Members:

This letter is written on behalf of the ACLU of Rhode Island and ARISE (Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education). We are writing to urge the school committee to reject the proposal to add a school resource officer to Barrington Middle School at its upcoming meeting tomorrow. Our organizations have long opposed the addition of school resource officers in Rhode Island schools, and our concern is heightened by the Committee's stated intention to additionally assign this officer to the elementary schools.

As stated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Barrington Police Department and the Barrington School District, school resource officers are first and foremost sworn police officers, operating under the police department, and not the school district. This distinction serves as a stark reminder that this person is not an educator or support staff, but a law enforcement officer.

We understand that the safety and support of students is paramount, but the presence of school resource officers offers a false sense of security without fundamentally addressing the root causes of school safety concerns. There is no evidence that school resource officers prevent school shootings, nor are they equipped to offer the social, emotional, and behavioral support that students need and that non-law enforcement school professionals could better provide. Students are better served by increased investment in more specialized personnel such as counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals, who are trained to provide that type of support to students.

Studies have shown that schools with school resource officers experience increased suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and student arrests.<sup>1</sup> This is despite the fact that school resource officers are discouraged from acting as school disciplinarians. These outcomes contribute directly to the school-to-prison pipeline and negatively impact educational outcomes. Our concern is compounded when one considers that students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <https://studentsdemandaction.org/report/address-the-presence-of-school-resource-officers-in-your-school/>

students both statewide and nationally are disproportionately affected by these harmful disciplinary tactics.<sup>2</sup>

We are also concerned about changes to reporting requirements between the 2024 MOU and the one signed in 2025 and currently in place. The 2024 MOU required weekly activity reports from the SRO to both the Barrington Police Department and the school principal, including detailed information on arrests, police interactions, referrals to the school resource officer, and educational trainings. This weekly reporting is absent from the 2025 MOU. Notably missing as well is an explicit reference to the reporting requirement, under R.I.G.L §16-2-17, of comprehensive data collection on the number of school resource officers, use of force against students, arrests and their justifications, referrals to law enforcement or court services, and other disciplinary actions involving students.

Instead, the 2025 MOU limits reporting obligations to the cost of the school resource officer, a description of the proposed mental, social, or emotional health support budget, and aggregate data on school-based arrests, citations, and court referrals. The added transparency that the data collection requirements missing from the 2025 MOU provide are vital to ensure that school resource officers are following their stated duties and not serving as “school disciplinarians.”

Like the school committee, we want students to be safe and to thrive. While we respect the intent to protect students, we strongly disagree that the increased use of law enforcement is the right approach. True safety comes from investing in supportive, preventive resources designed to help students, not from increased policing.

Thank you for considering our perspective. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Chanda Womack  
Executive Director  
ARISE

Steven Brown  
Executive Director  
ACLU of Rhode Island

cc: Robert Mitchell, Interim Superintendent  
Aubrey Lombardo

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<sup>2</sup> At the state level, see our March 2023 report, “Still Oversuspended and Underserved: Continued Disparities in Suspension Rates in Rhode Island.” <https://www.riaclu.org/publications/report-still-oversuspended-and-underserved-continued-disparities-suspension-rates-rhode/>