

November 4, 2022

VIA MAIL AND EMAIL

Dear Superintendent:

Last month, the Attorney General and the Department of Public Safety jointly announced the granting of funds to municipalities for the deployment of body-worn camera (BWC) technology by police. Included in their policies governing BWCs is authorization for use of this technology by school resource officers (SROs). Though our organizations strongly support oversight, transparency, and accountability of policing systems, we write to urge that your school district choose not to enter into an agreement with your local law enforcement agency to provide BWCs to any SROs in your community's schools. We hold deep concerns that introducing BWCs to schools will facilitate increased surveillance of students and improperly escalate minor, internal disciplinary issues into matters of criminal justice.

Equipping SROs with BWCs has significant implications for student privacy. The closed environment in which school-based law enforcement interactions are contained, and the likelihood of these interactions occurring around numerous other students, puts students at risk of being recorded whenever an SRO has contact with their peers. While the regulations governing BWCs direct officers to exercise discretion in sensitive areas, including schools, they also require officers to activate their cameras whenever they "self-initiate a call for service," which could imply that they should be activated every time an SRO approaches a student. (270-RICR-60-00-2 (2.5.8)) As a result, it is hard to know the extent of an SRO's day that will be recorded, but it is bound to both have an impact on student privacy and promote a culture of surveillance.

We are also concerned that the recording of innocuous or minor incidents could turn them into criminal justice matters. Through open records requests, our organizations have seen how very small issues which should be solved internally, like a student wearing a hat in violation of the school dress code, may be inappropriately redefined or escalated into a criminal matter when a police officer is involved. We can easily envision BWC footage being used for the purposes of internal disciplinary procedures, with administrators viewing BWC footage with the intention of using it to punish students for minor behaviors which could and should be navigated outside of the scope of both police involvement and police surveillance technology. In sum, we believe that any purported benefits from having recordings of SRO interaction with students is far outweighed by the negative impact of this technology in the school setting.

We deeply appreciate the mutual goal that we all have in ensuring a safe and equitable environment for all students, but our organizations have maintained, and continue to maintain, that the path to providing this for students is not through a police presence on campuses. We fear that the introduction of BWCs will only amplify this presence, and could have harmful residual effects on student privacy and other rights. For these reasons, we urge your district to decline the opportunity to outfit any SROs you may have in your schools with this technology.

Thank you in advance for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chanda Womack
Executive Director
Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Steven Brown
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island

Ramona Santos Torres
Executive Director
Parents Leading for Educational Equity

Precious López
Executive Director
Providence Student Union

Steven Dy & Vanessa Flores-Maldonado
Co-Executive Directors
Providence Youth Student Movement

Jennifer Wood
Executive Director
Rhode Island Center for Justice

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Executive Director
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Elliot Rivera
Executive Director
Youth in Action

Peter Chung
Executive Director
Young Voices

CC: The Hon. Peter Neronha
Colonel Darnell Weaver
Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green