

State Representative Harold P. Naughton
Chairman, Joint Committee on Public Safety
and Homeland Security
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02113
State Senator Michael O. Moore

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and Homeland Security
State House, Room 109-B
Boston, MA 02113

January 24, 2019

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Joint Committee:

This letter serves as testimony in SUPPORT of the Safe Communities Act H.3573 (Reps. Ruth Balser & Liz Miranda) and S.1401 (Sen. Eldridge).

MATSOL is a nonprofit professional association of over 1,800 educators of English learners in Massachusetts. Our members include educators in PK-12 schools, adult basic education, workplace programs, private language schools, and institutions of higher learning, as well as pre-service and in-service teacher educators. MATSOL's mission is to promote equity and excellence in the education of English Learners.

The passage of the Safe Communities Act is not just a public safety issue; it is also an educational issue. In Massachusetts, we are very proud of our educational system and the opportunities available to all students. However, these efforts are undermined by the current policies that cause our students and their families to be afraid and experience constant stress.

Our students of all ages need the love and support of their families in order to succeed in school, so it is vitally important to keep families together. We have heard disturbing reports from our members about the negative impact on their students when families are separated. No student should be denied educational opportunities because local officials are involved in immigration enforcement, which is the job of the federal government.

The Safe Communities Act will have a positive impact on student learning. Students of all ages need to feel safe and respected in order to learn, but instead many are experiencing chronic stress and trauma. Massachusetts has recognized the importance of inclusive and supportive learning environments by investing in initiatives such as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's [Social and Emotional Learning](#), [Trauma Sensitive Schools](#), and [Safe & Supportive Schools](#), and the Department of Higher Education's [Equity Agenda](#). However, these efforts are

undermined when students do not feel safe in their communities, or when they or their families hesitate to seek protection or medical care because of fear of family separation.

Parent engagement in PK-12 schools will also be supported by the Safe Communities Act. The LOOK Act of 2017 established English Learner Parent Advisory Councils (ELPACs) to promote parent engagement in their children's schools. However, our members — the teachers charged with reaching out to parents — report that their efforts are being thwarted because families are afraid to come to school and attend ELPAC meetings.

MATSOL urges you to support the Safe Communities Act in order to protect students and their families, and to allow our students in all educational contexts to pursue their educational goals. Most immigrant families include US citizens and people with varied immigration statuses, so the bill will have a far-reaching impact within our school communities. If we are serious about valuing every student, we need to show this by creating an environment in which every student can learn and thrive. The Safe Communities Act restores confidence in our public institutions, including our public schools and institutions of higher learning, by allowing our police and court officials to focus on public safety, providing clear guidance for their interactions with ICE. Thus, the Safe Communities Act is vital to the success of Massachusetts students and the future of the Commonwealth.

We urge the committee to report the bill out favorably for consideration by the state legislature.

Thank you for considering our testimony,

MATSOL Board of Directors

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