

Syed Menebhi, H5688, Against

As a public high school educator and parent whose children are in public schools in Rhode Island, I am firmly against H5688. Although the language in this bill has been altered so as to not explicitly mention gender identity, this bill was originally motivated by the national conversation around transgender students and privacy. My concern is that although this language is no longer explicitly used, the bill will be interpreted by many as meaning that educators must inform parents if their child is exploring a different gender identity than their sex assigned at birth. In addition, while I don't mind parents knowing which after school clubs are available to their children, I stand against having to inform parents which clubs their child is specifically attending.

I lead the Gender and Sexuality Alliance club (GSA) at my school, which is filled with incredible students, many of which are not open about their gender and/or sexuality outside of that space. These students have a right to privacy about their own identities and one of our GSA norms is that we do not expose who attended the club with anyone in the larger community, including with their families. This is often a necessary practice in order to ensure the safety of our students, since many face familial rejection, abuse, and homelessness if their parents knew they were questioning or exploring their identities.

Again, although this language isn't explicitly in this version of H5688, the original text of this bill included educators having to violate the privacy of LGBTQ+ students and put them in harm's way. In fact, the bill seems unnecessary written as is, since most of the proposed ideas at this point are already part of RI law and common sense practice in RI. Therefore, at its best, this bill is not impactful. Yet, at its worst, there are detrimental consequences to Rhode Island's LGBTQ+ youth.