

Lee Rodman AGAINST Bill H 5739

March 27, 2023

To the House Committee on Education:

I'm writing to you with deep concern about a bill that would restrict education on civil rights issues and historical events, bill H 5739. I urge you not to support this bill, and to vote AGAINST passing it out of committee if a vote takes place.

This bill's summary in the committee agenda deceptively claims that its goal is to "protect and respect the civil rights of all members of the school community." However, the bill includes numerous statements that suggest the opposite.

For instance, the bill states: "(1) Ideological materials, worksheets, homework, texts or assigned reading, and/or mentored discussions that depict identity groups as oppressors and/or victims shall not be incorporated within the pedagogy or curricula of schools." It seems that this bill would make it nearly impossible to teach about important historical topics such as the Holocaust, slavery, or even the founding of Rhode Island by people seeking freedom from religious oppression. In fact, another line from the bill specifically names a curriculum about slavery as an example of curricula to be prohibited: "(7) Schools shall not use the 1619 Project curriculum or any other curricula that pursues a predominantly ideological and/or activist outcome."

By prohibiting schools from teaching about histories of oppression, this bill would disproportionately prevent students from minority and/or marginalized groups from knowing the history of people who share their identity. This inequity does not align with the bill's stated purpose of respecting civil rights.

Moreover, much of the bill's language is so vague as to be impossible to enact or enforce. As an example, the bill requires that "Values, psychological and medical counseling, and political activism shall not be taught in classrooms or in any school setting." If values cannot be taught in a school, how can a school prohibit cheating on tests, or encourage kindergarteners to share?

Given that this bill would perpetuate inequity and contains language too imprecise to be enacted, I ask that you please do all you can to prevent this bill from moving forward, and that you vote AGAINST it if a vote is held.

Sincerely,

Lee Rodman
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