

Chair McNamara and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 5487.

My name is Sydney Harris, and I am a student of Brown University. As one of your constituents, I am writing to urge your support for H. 5487 in banning legacy admissions at institutions of higher education in Rhode Island.

Legacy admissions, the practice of giving preferential treatment to applicants with parent alumni, undermines the principle of equal opportunity in our education system. By admitting students on familial connections rather than individual merit and qualifications, schools practicing legacy admissions prioritize bloodline over fairness, reinforcing existing disparities that keep higher education wealthy and White. These schools then act as fast-tracks to corporate leadership and elite governmental roles, reinforcing a cycle that maintains wealth and power within a select few. I reject this unjust cycle, and I call upon the House Education Committee to support a school community that reflects a fair and just admissions process, rather than admitting certain applicants over others simply on the basis of bloodline.

At universities like Brown and Providence College, where more students come from the top 1% than the bottom 20%, legacy admissions does not simply act as a tiebreaker or singular factor in a complex admissions process. Parental connection is a chief mechanism for perpetuating class disparities within education. Legacy students are nearly four times as likely to be admitted to an Ivy+ college, such as Brown University, than non-legacy applicants with the same test scores (Chetty, et. al). This advantage only increases as legacies' family wealth increases; legacy students from the top 1% are five times as likely to be admitted.

As a current student and voter deeply concerned about fairness in Rhode Island's education system, I recognize it is imperative that we take concrete steps to address this issue. Banning legacy admissions would promote equality by ensuring that all applicants are evaluated based on their own accomplishments, abilities, and potential, rather than their family's alma mater. California, Illinois, Maryland, Colorado, and Virginia have all banned legacy admissions through state legislation. We respectfully call upon the Rhode Island House to join the movement and support H. 5487 in creating a more just education system that serves the best interests of all Rhode Island students.

Thank you for your attention and time. I look forward to your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Sydney Harris