



ADEQUOYAH

My name is Adequoyah, and I am a Providence high school student and youth leader with Youth In Action. I'm writing in support of House Bill 5836 because I've seen firsthand how powerful representation in education can be—and how harmful its absence is.

Growing up in a predominantly white area, I was one of the few BIPOC students at my school. Because of this, I often faced marginalization, daily microaggressions, and racism. I felt overlooked—not just by my peers, but by an education system that failed to reflect my identity or experiences. A major reason for this was the lack of diversity—not only in the student body, but in the curriculum itself. Without representation in what we learned, harmful behaviors went unchecked, and students like me were left feeling invisible.

One of the clearest examples of this was in my history classes. African American history was often downplayed, altered, or skipped altogether. America was built on the labor and resilience of African Americans, yet our contributions and struggles were treated like an afterthought. And when topics like slavery or the civil rights movement *were* discussed, I could feel the weight of being the only Black student in the room—all eyes turned to me. It was isolating. My culture and identity weren't seen as important enough to be fully included in our education, and that left a lasting impact.

This is why I believe an ethnic studies course is essential. It's not just about learning history—it's about being seen, about feeling valued. For students of color, it sends a powerful message: *you matter*. Your story is part of the American story. And for all students, it fosters deeper understanding, empathy, and connection. This isn't about taking anything away from students who haven't faced these same struggles—it's about adding truth, context, and inclusivity to our classrooms.

Research supports this too. Ethnic studies programs have been shown to improve student engagement, academic performance, and cross-cultural understanding. A Stanford University study found that students in ethnic studies courses had better attendance and higher GPAs. When students see themselves reflected in what they learn, it builds confidence, belonging, and a stronger commitment to education.

Passing this bill is a step toward making Rhode Island's education system truly inclusive. No student should have to feel invisible in their own school. Representation matters—and I urge you to support this bill so that future students don't have to experience what I did.