

Testimony of Support for House Bill 5836

My name is Anna Ryu, and I am an undergraduate at Brown University studying Education Studies and Chemistry. I am getting my Master's of Arts in Teaching for secondary chemistry at Brown next year, and I plan to stay in Providence to teach high school chemistry at one of our community's treasured public schools in the long-term.

I am writing in enthusiastic, urgent support of House Bill 5836 through four lenses: as an undergraduate student of Education Studies, as an aspiring high school chemistry teacher, as a volunteer of four years in our Providence Public School District elementary schools, and as a former K-12 student.

1. As a student of Education, I have spent the last four years studying how important it is for students to see themselves reflected in their curricula and their teachers. Whether we look at it from a research-based, results-focused angle or one of personal narratives and anecdotal experiences, it is undeniable. Students learn better when they are taught in culturally responsive ways, with content and methods that honor their unique contexts and cultures. This bill is a critical step towards putting into practice what education research has been telling us for decades.
2. Even as I plan to be a STEM teacher, the necessity for Ethnic Studies is deeply and urgently felt. Building our collective understandings (for students and educators alike) around the often overlooked histories, narratives, and current realities of our marginalized communities of color are *essential* to more-holistically understanding the fields of science. Ethnic Studies curriculum would positively challenge our students to think critically about the deep entanglements between “science” (as a field of study, institution) and historical, societal structures (of racism, classism, immigration). These two realms of study cannot be separated—in fact, they *deepen* each other and our abilities to fully understand them.
3. I have had the absolute joy of working with first- and second-graders at the elementary schools Martin Luther King Jr. and Young Woods throughout the past four years as a Tutor/Mentor volunteer with Inspiring Minds. I have some of the best hours of my week when I am with my students because they teach me so much. I have learned from them that, even at six years old, they have a fierce desire to express and share themselves, their cultures, and their languages. They look for ways to authentically bring themselves into the classroom as we plow through the “mainstream” curriculum, whether it means making connections between the storybooks we read in class to their own families, or simply in the way some might choose to speak to me in Spanish. They carry ***so much*** enthusiasm with them into school (in the way our young ones do), and yet, I can't help but feel a quiet sadness when I see the ways the school day marginalizes their diverse identities and cultures. Often unintentionally, because our schools carry such long and difficult legacies, the curricula and pedagogy prioritize a Eurocentric perspective of the world—from the references that are considered “common,” to the obtuse dominance of

English in an “MLL”-designated classroom, to classroom routines. **If we are to disrupt these legacies, we must institutionally and formally make space to teach, learn, and acknowledge the experiences of racialized, marginalized communities—especially for our students in middle and high school, who we are obligated to prepare for informed, empowered lives beyond secondary school.**

4. And finally, as a former student of a public K-12 system myself, I think back how the most *important* experiences that shaped my values, understandings of histories, and the very motivation I have to become a teacher of color serving our public schools did not, unfortunately, come from my formal education. It came from spaces that had resources, conversations, readings, and people that engaged with narratives that *mattered* to me, *resonated* with me, *shocked* me, and truly *educated* me. I feel so grateful I found my way into these book clubs, virtual gathering spaces, and communities. And the opportunity we have here—to formalize and institutionalize an Ethnic Studies course for students to activate their thinking, deepen their engagement, and empower their agencies—is one I sincerely hope we do not miss.

I urge with fierce hope that you pass House Bill 5836. I hope you will listen to the countless voices of our students, teachers, scholars, and community members, who *know* how critical this is for our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.