

## Testimony for Rhode Island Senate Bill H5836

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**To: Rhode Island Senate Education Committee**

State House, Providence, RI

**Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill H5836**

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Isabel Quero-Hernández, and I am writing in **strong support** of Senate Bill H5836, which aims to mandate Rhode Island students receive a yearlong Ethnic Studies class. As an educator, I strongly urge you to support this legislation. This not only affirms our commitment to equity and inclusion, but is strongly backed by a growing body of evidence showing its profound benefits for student outcomes and community cohesion.

### **Why This Bill is Critical for Rhode Island**

Ethnic studies courses offer students the opportunity to explore histories, cultures, and perspectives that have been historically underrepresented in traditional curricula. These courses foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of systemic inequality. Most importantly, they help students of ALL backgrounds see themselves—and each other—in the curriculum.

A 2021 Stanford University study of San Francisco Unified School District's ethnic studies pilot found that students enrolled in ethnic studies courses had significantly higher attendance rates, grade point averages, and credits earned toward graduation compared to their peers. Notably, the gains were strongest for students who had previously been academically at risk. This suggests that ethnic studies not only enriches education but actively narrows opportunity gaps.

In addition, a 2019 University of Arizona meta-analysis found that ethnic studies curricula contributed to higher academic engagement, improved student-teacher relationships, and enhanced sense of identity and belonging—particularly for students of color. In a state as drivers as Rhode Island, these benefits are essential.

## **Reflecting the Reality of Our Classrooms**

Rhode Island's student body is increasingly diverse: more than 45% of public school students identify as Black, Latino, Asian, Indigenous, or multiracial. And yet, a majority of these students rarely encounter accurate or affirming representations of their histories and cultures in core subjects.

When our students learn about movements for civil rights, labor, gender equity, and immigration reform—not as side notes, but as central to the fabric of our shared history—they gain the capacity to better understand the present and to participate meaningfully in shaping the future.

## **Rhode Island Can Lead**

By passing Senate Bill H5836, Rhode Island has the opportunity to be a leader in ensuring that public education reflects the diversity, complexity, and promise of our state and nation. Several states—including California, Oregon, and Washington—have adopted ethnic studies requirements or frameworks, and Rhode Island can build upon their success while tailoring implementations to our unique context.

Senate Bill H5836 is a strategic investment in educational equity, civic engagement, and long-term social cohesion.

I respectfully urge this committee to advance Senate Bill H5836 and take a decisive step toward a more inclusive, equitable, and informed Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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