

From The Desk of
Jacob N. S. Brier, MBA

April 20, 2025

Dear Chair McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee,

I write to you today expressing my **opposition to the current version of H5836, with support of its intent and for its passage, following crucial amendments.**

In reverse order, first I'll address my support of its intent. Education about the many cultures, backgrounds and experiences of Rhode Islanders and Americans throughout history is integral to a well-rounded understanding of who we collectively are today, and who we hope to become tomorrow. Existing curriculum has a disproportionate emphasis on Euro-centric American history. Even when told from the perspectives of other communities, the stories are rooted in that background. The attempt to correct this through the required inclusion of more perspectives is valuable and I would like it to be successful.

In order to support the bill, there are two areas that raise concern, in different ways; §16-22-39(a)(1) the listing of ethnicities/background/topics to be included, and §16-22-39(g) curriculum development.

The Jewish People are more than adherents to a particular religion. In fact, many Jews do not adhere to a religion, but are a People with a shared cultural heritage, like the other groups listed in subsection (a)(1). The absence of Jewish Americans from this draft must be remedied in order for the bill to be passed and implemented in a way that will not worsen the crisis facing the American Jewish community.

Jewish people comprise approximately 2% of the population and according to FBI data, anti-Jewish hate crimes account for 15% of all hate crimes. The lack of inclusion in the initial draft of this bill is a hurtful reminder of how easily the needs and safety of Jewish people can be overlooked, despite the dramatically disproportionate attacks on Jews. The hurt is compounded by the absence of the Holocaust alongside the Armenian Genocide. Why one and not the other?

Pronouns: they/them | Barrington, Rhode Island | jacobnbrier@gmail.com | (401) 903-2832

Jacob N. S. Brier, MBA

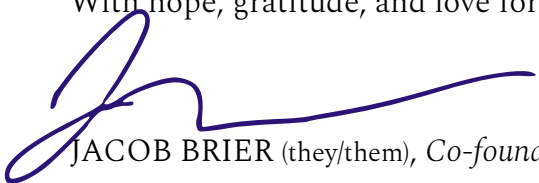
That said, neither the Holocaust nor the Armenian Genocide belong as singled-out topics in this bill, because no People should be defined by the worst tragedies to be inflicted upon them, whether by European Christians in the case of the Holocaust, or by Arab Muslims in the case of the Armenian Genocide. Neither of these events define the respective cultures or identities of either the victims or the perpetrators. Historic events have their own – also critical – place.

I am a firm believer in the tenet “nothing about us without us.” I admire the student-led nature of this bill and the requirement that representatives from community organizations be involved in the curriculum development. Student voices are critical, and student representation in the curriculum development process is valuable.

I would like to see our state’s curriculum remain primarily designed by people who have expertise in both the subject matter and the delivery of educational programming. If student voices are over-represented on the leadership council, as they are in the composition described in the draft of the bill, their valuable personal experience will diminish the value needed from experts with broad knowledge and viewpoints. A focus should remain on representation from the ethnic groups being included in the curriculum, with at least one person identifying primarily with each ethnicity listed. The “youth-led” requirement of community organizations should be removed, in place of favoring organizations for their academic credentials.

I look forward to the incorporation of these changes and will support the passage of a revised bill, broadening the education of Rhode Islanders without exacerbating antisemitism.

With hope, gratitude, and love for our community,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Brier', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JACOB BRIER (they/them), *Co-founder*

Barrington Community Progress Association

cc: House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi, Rep Jennifer Boylan, Sen Pamela Lauria