



April 23, 2025

House Bill H 5836 - "Our History, Our Schools, Our Future: About Ethnic Studies Bill"

Dear Chair McNamara and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Leah. I am a senior attending Barrington High School and a Youth Organizer with the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE). I am writing in support of House Bill H 5836 because I believe in the powerful educational and cognitive benefits it would have on Rhode Island Schools.

Many studies, through institutions such as Stanford and Harvard, as well as our own through ARISE, have shown that Ethnic Studies is extremely beneficial for students of all ages. Attendance rates increase, student engagement goes up, and test scores improve. A class that centers the identities of people that have historically been put aside and focuses on one's own culture allows for more interest and engagement from minority students.

I have experienced this firsthand—the summer before my sophomore year, I was involved in a two week Ethnic Studies program through ARISE (the program that encouraged me to officially join). While taking this course, I was actually interested in American history for the first time, and felt comfortable discussing it with others. For the first time, as an Asian American, my own culture was at the forefront of my education. For the first time, I was exposed to different cultures whose histories have long been ignored. I learned about the Chicano movement of the sixties and seventies, and the history of Asian Americans in social activism. I learned about the social movements by Black people and Indigenous history right here in Rhode Island.

Most importantly, I was learning it through the perspective of members of these communities. I was not being taught a critical aspect of my own and others' history through the lens of an oppressive colonizer. The impact of these teachings coming from someone who had direct experiences like my own and like I envisioned for myself was not lost on me.

I can only imagine what a full semester course would incorporate and how valuable that would be to myself and other students of color, to see ourselves fully represented in classes in a way we haven't seen before. This would hold immense value white students as well, to have the opportunity to learn about other cultures and histories that they have also lacked the knowledge of, or possibly even explore aspects of their own ethnic identities they have not had the chance to explore.

Proper representation of people's cultures is critical to develop one's understanding of the world, as well as ensuring that minority students can have a place where they feel seen and understood. It is apparent that in the society we live in today, education on the realities of our world and how we are impacted by that is invaluable to students to prepare them for the future.

I urge you to support this bill and see this reality come to fruition, fostering educational environments where all students, especially those most vulnerable and most often left behind, are encouraged to succeed.

Thank you for your time,

Leah  
12th grade