

SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 5836 – “ETHNIC STUDIES”

My name is Mark Levy and I am writing -- and appearing -- in support of Ethnic Studies curriculum development and teaching as proposed in House Bill 5836.

Personally, I have been a social studies teacher -- both on the secondary school and college levels. I'm retired and my wife and I live in Bristol.

I served as a coordinator of a Freedom School in Mississippi in 1964, then taught 8th grade in a multi-ethnic school that sat on the borders of Columbia University, Spanish Harlem, and Afro-American Harlem. Next, I was on the faculty at one of NYC's public universities and taught first an introductory Euro-centered course called Contemporary Civilization which, after a student rebellion, was changed to a Third World Studies course.

Additionally, as a young person in NYC, I started at a secondary school that was all-white, all-male, all-middle-class, all-US born. In my upper year, I transferred to (and graduated from) a very ethnically diverse and co-ed high school. Experiencing that change -- and learning from its international and racial diversity -- was one of the best and most important events that not only shaped my later life but also made me a better neighbor, citizen, and person.

I firmly believe that Ethnic Studies provides a structure to add to the teaching of US and Rhode Island History. We are a diverse nation and state. We live in an interconnected world. We benefit and develop mutual respect by learning from each other and about each other. Each of us has a story to tell – and we grow by listening to others'.

In closing: One of my most exciting and encouraging recent experiences was an afternoon I spent at the Providence Student Union office where students were giving Ethnic Studies-type presentations related to their family's international backgrounds.

The student eagerness and cooperation was of a wonderfully high level. The information was solid; the presentations were engaging and creative. This (old) teacher learned so much from the (young) students.

This proposed legislation is innovative, exemplary, and would benefit not only students but also our teachers, schools, and communities.

Mark Levy – 30 Summer St., Bristol, RI 02809