



MERRILL SCHMIDT

My name is Merrill Schmidt, and I live in Cranston, RI. I'm writing in support of H-5836 (the Ethnic Studies bill). This bill would launch a yearlong Ethnic Studies course in all RI schools for the 2026-27 school year, make Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement by 2030, prioritize the histories of people of color in the United States and Rhode Island, encourage project-based learning in the course, create a student-led group to oversee Ethnic Studies curriculum, and increase opportunities for districts to partner with community-based organizations.

I work with youth leaders at Providence Student Union (PSU), a nonprofit youth-led organization, who have worked tirelessly over the years to advocate for Ethnic Studies. Student advocates recognize the importance of having a relevant and accurate social studies curriculum that does not perpetuate white supremacy in their schools. I believe that we should uplift and listen to the young leaders who are making a very strong case for a change in their education that would increase engagement in school and other learning outcomes. As a staff member of PSU and partner with OurSchoolsPVD, I have attended youth-led workshops on the concept of Ethnic Studies, Southeast Asian and Cape Verdean immigration to Rhode Island, and other important topics. I have personally learned a lot from these workshops and wish this content was part of my K-12 education.

When I was attending my public high school in the South, I recognized the bias of prioritizing white, male and American perspectives in my US history and world history text books. This bothered me at the time, and I complained about it to my family and friends; however, we did not have any groups that I know of like PSU or OurSchoolsPVD that were advocating for a different approach. As an adult, I have made an effort to learn about the role of power, oppression, and resistance in our country's history as well as the stories of non-white communities. This critical content should not be left out of our public schools, and we should not let right-wing extremists dictate what RI students learn. As a white person in a multi-racial family, I think Ethnic Studies curriculum is very important for both white students and people of color, so that we can move forward together in a more informed and understanding way.

Thanks for your consideration!