



April 23rd, 2025

House Bill 5836– “Our History, Our Schools, Our Future: About Ethnic Studies Bill”

Dear Chair McNamara and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Zon and I am a Youth Leader at ARISE. I am speaking to strongly support House Bill No. 5836, the Ethnic Studies Bill. As a student and Liberian minority in America, I know how powerful it is to see not only yourself, but your family, and your history represented in what you learn. Too often, our schools curriculum leaves out the voices, experiences, and contributions of people who look like me and my classmates. That has made school feel disconnected from our real lives and our communities. This bill would change that.

By making Ethnic Studies a required yearlong course in every Rhode Island high school, starting with the Class of 2030, students across the state would finally have the chance to learn a fuller, more honest version of history one that includes Indigenous history, Black history, Asian American history, Latin American history, Arab American history, and more. That representation matters. It helps us understand ourselves, each other, and the systems around us.

Having more teachers of color in our schools would also make a huge difference. It's not just about who teaches, it's about how we're taught and what we're encouraged to believe about our own potential. Ethnic Studies would give students the tools to think critically, speak up, and feel empowered.

This bill is personal to me, to my peers, and to our families. It's about making education something that connects us, rather than something that leaves so many of us out.

I respectfully urge you to pass House Bill No. 5836. Thank you.

Zon
11th grade