

Personal Testimony in Support of Bills H5744 and H5982

Good afternoon, my name is Celia, and I am a freshman at Brown University studying sociology. I stand before you not just as a student, but as someone whose life has been profoundly shaped by the absence of bilingual education. I urge your support for **Bill H5744, the Bilingual, Dual Language, and World Language Teachers Investment Act**, and **Bill H5982, the Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act**. These bills are not just policies—they are promises to future generations that their languages, cultures, and identities will be valued, not erased.

My Story: The Cost of Lost Language

I was five years old when my mother brought me to Mexico after my parents' separation. There, I was surrounded by the vibrant colors of my culture—the bright limes and pinks of the buildings, the sounds of Banda music, the taste of esquites from street vendors. But when I returned to the U.S., I quickly learned that my Spanish name, my accent, and my heritage were seen as obstacles, not gifts. Teachers anglicized my name to "*Seel-ya*" without asking, telling me it was "*easier*" for them. With each mispronunciation, I felt a piece of myself disappear. By middle school, I had stopped correcting them altogether. I became "*Cecilia*"—a name that, in its English form, means "*blind*." And in many ways, I was. I was blind to the beauty of my own culture, blind to the strength in my roots, and blind to the fact that I had a right to take up space as my full, authentic self.

It wasn't until my ninth-grade literature teacher—a Latina woman—looked at me and said, "*Sehl-ya?*" with perfect pronunciation that I realized what I had lost. Her simple question—"*Aren't you Hispanic?*"—felt like an awakening. I wondered: *Had I abandoned my culture, or had it been taken from me?*

I began rebuilding my connection to Spanish through classes and outside activities. With every verb conjugation and every note played on my violin, I reclaimed a part of myself that had been suppressed. But this journey should not be so difficult. No child should have to fight to love their own name or language.

Why These Bills Matter

These bills are about more than language—they are about **dignity, equity, and opportunity**.

1. **Equity:** Over **40% of students in Rhode Island's urban districts speak a language other than English at home**. Yet, many lack access to programs that honor their linguistic heritage. Bilingual education isn't just a preference—it's a necessity for students to thrive academically and professionally.
2. **Excellence:** Research shows that **bilingual education leads to stronger academic outcomes** for both multilingual learners and English-dominant students. Dual-language programs are the **gold standard**—they don't just preserve culture; they boost cognitive development and test scores.

3. **Economy: 9 out of 10 Rhode Island employers seek bilingual workers.** By investing in multilingual education, we strengthen our workforce, attract businesses, and prepare students for a competitive future.
4. **Teacher Shortage:** We have a wealth of multilingual adults ready to teach, but **barriers to certification prevent them from entering the profession.** These bills will **recruit and retain bilingual educators**, ensuring students have teachers who reflect their experiences.

A Call to Action

I am now a student preparing to study policy and governance, determined to break cycles of inequity. But no policy I draft in the future will undo the years I spent feeling like my voice didn't belong. That's why I'm here today—to ask you to **act now**. Passing these bills will send a message to every child that the future that they matter and are valued

I urge you to vote **YES on H5744 and H5982**. Our communities have waited long enough. Thank you.