



Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Organizational Testimony in Support of HB 7581

April 28, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), we write in strong support of H7581, which establishes a dedicated, statewide funding stream for civics education.

At ARISE, we believe that civics education is not an abstract subject—it is a critical, lived practice that equips young people to understand and shape the conditions of their lives. This bill represents a vital step toward ensuring that all Rhode Island students, particularly those most impacted by systemic inequities, have access to meaningful, high-quality civic learning opportunities.

As outlined in H7581, this legislation creates a categorical funding stream for civics education, including investments in teacher professional development, student-led civic projects, culturally responsive curriculum, and partnerships with community organizations . These are not optional enhancements—they are essential components of an education system that prepares young people to fully participate in a democratic society.

Our youth leaders consistently affirm the importance of civics education in their own words:

One ARISE youth organizer shared, *“Being aware and engaged in how our government functions and operates allows me as a young person to understand the situations, conditions, and environments that I am surrounded by.”* Another youth leader emphasized that *“civics education helps people understand their rights, participate in government, and make informed decisions.”*

These reflections highlight a core truth: young people are already deeply affected by policy decisions, yet too often they are denied the tools to understand or influence those decisions.

Students also made clear that civics education is directly tied to equity and lived experience. One youth leader shared, *“Learning about civic education in ARISE helps me realize how policies affect me and my peers in real time... it gives me the tools to stay involved in my community and make change.”* Another emphasized that *“youth—especially youth of color—are impacted by these choices,”* and therefore must be equipped not just to vote, but to actively engage in shaping legislation and community outcomes .

At ARISE, we have seen firsthand what is possible when young people are resourced to engage civically. Through youth participatory action research, community organizing, and Ethnic Studies programming, our youth have testified at the State House, led campaigns for education justice, and contributed to statewide policy conversations. Civics education, when done well, is not passive—it is transformative.

However, access to this kind of education remains uneven across Rhode Island. Without dedicated funding, many districts lack the capacity to provide robust civics instruction, support student-led projects, or invest in culturally responsive teaching practices. H7581 addresses this gap by ensuring that funding is distributed based on district need, including factors such as student population, socioeconomic status, and multilingual learner populations .

Our youth are clear about what is at stake. As one youth leader put it, *“Civics education matters to me because it directly affects my future... the youth today are and will continue to be leaders.”* Another added, *“It allows youth to learn how to advocate for themselves and others.”*

Investing in civics education is an investment in a more informed, engaged, and equitable Rhode Island. It ensures that young people are not only prepared to navigate the systems that shape their lives, but to transform them.

For these reasons, ARISE strongly urges the committee to pass H7581.

Thank you for your time and consideration.