



ARISE

Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Organizational Testimony in Support of House Bill #H5421 – “Right to Adequate Education”
March 1, 2021

Contact:

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Chairman Shanley and members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections:

As an organization that has been co-leading the fight for a constitutional right to a civics education in the ongoing litigation of *Cook v. Raimondo*, the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE) believes that all Rhode Island residents are entitled to an education that adequately prepares them to exercise their civil rights and achieve both financial stability and personal success and fulfillment.

We support House Bill H5421, which would give Rhode Islanders the choice to prioritize the education of our state’s children by enshrining the right to such an education in our state’s constitution.

Critically, the constitutional amendment proposed in H5421 would provide a legal recourse for students, families, and communities who are underserved, overlooked, or neglected by our state’s education system, a recourse that does not currently exist.

“I have seen first-hand how education can majorly change someone’s life, even within my own family and community. My family would be nothing without the education that they received. If education wasn’t granted to them, the majority of my family would be working paycheck to paycheck with little to no knowledge of how the world works. Education was my family’s ticket out of poverty and a lifetime’s worth of debt.”

–Arouney Sithaphone, sophomore at Woonsocket High School and ARISE after-school participant

“I believe that we should all have adequate education because we are all growing up in the same society. Not having adequate education is how society keeps Black folks where they are.”

–Fatima Anne, senior at Woonsocket High School and ARISE Youth Leader

It is not enough merely to tell a child that they can be whatever they want when they grow up; we must hold ourselves and our officials and institutions accountable for the education we are actually providing them. Recognizing education as an enforceable constitutional right is a critical first step toward that accountability.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to support the passage of House Bill H5421 to allow the voters of Rhode Island to amend the state constitution to include an explicit right to an adequate and meaningful education for all students.

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