



**Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education**  
Organizational Testimony in Opposition to House Bill #H7539  
April 11, 2022

**Contact:**

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Chairman McNamara and members of the House Committee on Education:

The Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education Justice (ARISE) **wholeheartedly condemns** the proposal of House Bill 7539, which unequivocally puts our youth – especially transgender and BIPOC youth – at risk of significant harm. The bill, which bans educators from speaking about structural racism and privilege (and censors terms such as “supremacy”), polices knowledge and truth in a way that: obscures systems of harm, prevents us from critically evaluating such systems, and **invalidates the lived experiences of BIPOC students**. The bill simultaneously mandates that “children shall be addressed using their common names and the pronouns associated with their biological gender,” thereby denying the gender identities of transgender students; punishing students for being transgender; and positing cisgender students as “the norm,” against which being transgender is “wrong.” Additionally, this threatens to **expose students in unsafe environments** as transgender without consent, putting their mental and physical health at risk.

These are only two of many harmful amendments proposed by this bill. For the safety and well-being of our students, ARISE calls for this House Bill 7539 to be vetoed by the House. Both we and our ARISE Youth Leaders stand with the Rhode Island students to call for an education that centers truth and knowledge, and that protects our most vulnerable students.

Below are testimonies from from our Youth Leaders, who speak from lived experience and who stand in solidarity with those who would be directly targeted and affected by HB 7539:

“Hello, my name is Akyla Proeung. I am a youth organizer for ARISE. I will be addressing the pernicious implementation of bill H7539. Students should have the **right to access an adequate curriculum** in schools, and **the bill that is currently being enacted should not be passed**. *Why would we want possible chaos that will only hinder our educational opportunities and allow those who disagree to fail our overall learning?* Don't enforce something that will ultimately interfere with our desire to learn. We, the students,

seek for change and improvements in our education. **You are perpetuating inequality and ignorance by limiting and silencing our past, which is built on racial disparities, inequalities, trauma, and our authenticity.**" - *Akyla Proeung, 12th Grade, ARISE Youth Leader*

"Hello my name is Cesar Morel. I am a youth leader at ARISE and I am from Providence, Rhode Island. This bill should not be passed because **students have the right to know their history and the truth behind it.** If this bill is passed, then teachers are not going to be able to have honest conversations about race with students. I know that race is an uncomfortable subject but it has to be taught in schools and it has to be taught by the right people who have more experience addressing these issues. Students need to learn this and right now these bills are getting way out of hand. We already have witnessed multiple CRT bills and recently the "Don't Say Gay" bill being passed. Enough is enough, we **demand a better education that is less white washed and that does not cater towards white people and white history.** It is very important to **at least listen to what we (the students) have to say about this action because students are the future and the next generation.** If more bills like this keep happening, then **there will be more division and history will repeat itself.**" - *Cesar Morel, 12th Grade, ARISE Youth Leader*

"Hello my name is Gabrielle Oulette, I am a youth leader with ARISE from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Today I am here to address the harmful implementation of bill H7539. By passing this bill, you are stripping students of an accurate and adequate education. By censoring, excluding, and silencing our history constructed of racial inequities, inequalities, trauma, and our truth; **you are perpetuating oppression and ignorance. To end the cycle of oppression, we must teach uncensored and unfiltered ethnic studies.** Rather than ignoring our country's violent, white supremacist history we must teach it; not to make white student's feel "guilty" but to normalize addressing power, privilege, and oppression. Erasing our history does not make it any less real or factual and **by implementing ethnic studies we are able to alter history, not repeat it. Ethnic studies is for the future leaders of this world** and we deserve a realistic, diverse, and critical curriculum to match the issues within our environments and communities we see everyday. Due to the detrimental consequences this bill would have on Rhode Island's communities, House Bill 7539 should not be passed." - *Gabrielle Oulette, 11th Grade, ARISE Youth Leader*

"Hi, my name is Nhi Nguyen, and I'm a youth leader from Dover, New Hampshire. Although I'm not from Rhode Island, my state has implemented a similar practice as HB7539 known as HB2. As a result, teachers are restricted to have honest conversations with their students as race is a part of our histories and embedded in our institutions. The lack of diversity in our curriculum and in our classrooms, **leads to the lack of empathy within our students.** This is then manifested in microaggressions, a common form of discrimination in classrooms. Teachers in New Hampshire are not trained on how to handle them and are put into uncomfortable positions. In addition, students of color are forced to assimilate into Western culture and we are not represented in our history lessons. In addition, HB2 halts the work of ethnic studies where it challenges individuals to reflect upon their identities and **give them the critical thinking skills to improve their communities.** Implacing HB7539 not only will have Rhode Island students face the same barriers as New Hampshire students, **but it will also overlook the labor and hardships that many organizations, like ARISE, faced.**" - *Nhi Nguyen, 11th Grade, ARISE Youth Leader*

With that in mind, we ask you to please dismiss the passing of House Bill H7539. Thank you.