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Support for House Bill No. ~~5836~~

As a former chairperson of the Rhode Island Student Advisory Council and a non-voting member of the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education, I, Milly Asherov, support House Bill No. 5836. It would ensure that students have a structural voice in decision-making spaces pertaining to their experiences in schools.

The chairperson's role is to set the agenda for the Student Advisory Council and facilitate meetings, they get to hear the concerns of students from across the state. I believe that through their experience leading and listening, they can use what they have learned to participate in voting on the council.

During my time as the student advisory council's chairperson, I spent hours raising concerns and questions. While the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education does an impressive job considering student experience, they are not students themselves. I trust that future student advisory council members can represent the best interests of Rhode Island students while voting on items because they are current students who are currently concerned about the well-being of their peers. Students experience the conditions of our schools and education system every day, not the adults sitting around the table.

Additionally, when adults agreed with me, they loved having a student voice on the council. But, when a student held a different perspective from the other voting members, there was no way for that opinion to be shown at equal weight to the final decision. Without a vote, student representatives can voice concerns, but those concerns can ultimately be ignored without accountability. Giving students a vote ensures that their perspectives are not just heard but also have a tangible impact on the policies that directly affect them.

Allowing a student to vote ensures that students' needs are represented fully on the council. With our school's intention being to serve their students, it's essential for this purpose to be seen through by giving students a voice that holds equal weight to other members.

Rhode Island schools will only benefit from this addition to the chairperson's role, it will give students an avenue to provide input and incentivize students to get involved with the Student Advisory Council.