



April 29, 2021

RE: OPPOSITION TO 21-S 803

Dear Members of Senate Judiciary Committee:

For some of the same reasons that our organizations oppose S-729, the Attorney General's "civil rights advocate" bill, we also oppose S-803, which would give that prosecutorial office more power to charge people with "hate crimes."

We oppose this bill because expanding the scope of the hate crime law as S-803 does could just as easily be used against members of our communities as against those engaged in truly racist acts. We know that is so because if the police are willing to charge three people with felonies for splashing paint on a boarded-up statue of Christopher Columbus, we are all at risk of the expansion of police powers that this bill seeks to codify.

We also know that the hate crime law enshrines the discredited and racially discriminatory tool of mandatory sentencing as punishment. Its presence and expanded use in this law only helps to legitimate its use for other crimes.

At bottom, S-803 is more interested in policing and punishing than addressing the core civil rights issues that affect our communities. We need immediate changes in police practices and drastic limits on their powers. By focusing attention on the isolated acts of individuals, however, legislation like this diverts attention away from the institutional structures that promote racism and hate and put members of our communities at risk every day.

We have more reason than many others to oppose crimes motivated by hate. But believe us when we say that that S-803 is not the solution we are looking for. We call on you to oppose S-803.

Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)
Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)
Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)