

**Testimony of Shannon Kazee**  
**Oppose Senate Bill 121 Education Committee**  
**June 9, 2020**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Shannon Kazee. I am a 16-year-old former public-school student who now is homeschooled. I oppose Senate Bill (SB) 121 based on experiences from public school and my own personal health issues. I have severe food intolerances, along with other health issues, including epilepsy. As someone who has experienced these and who knows many people with these issues, I can say that not everybody can mesh with or practice all of the health education standards.

As one of my first examples, my family follows many “alternative” health practices including diet and lifestyle choices. I personally do not think of them as alternative; I think of them as the way that I stay healthy. On that front, I am taking a human nutrition class at Columbus State Community College, and I have had to formally address my epilepsy and intolerances to my teacher because the curriculum doesn’t include much coverage on non-mainstream dietary issues and needs. In the textbooks, they say that everyone should follow the strict daily intake guidelines set in place for all people, unless told otherwise by a doctor. I feel that the individual and parents should have the freedom to choose and know multiple ways of practicing health, and not just from books but also from real-life experiences. Some of the most meaningful ways kids learn about nutrition is by experiencing it, including growing food even in small amounts and indoors; seeing, touching, and tasting whole foods and nutritious foods from various cultures; and having fun with foods and movement.

When I was still in public school, my mother and father would both help organize and host the parties for my classrooms. They made sure to include something healthy and fun to eat, something artistic, something active, and something to give back to the community. Kids loved it when we brought in fruit trays shaped like animals and other creations, and they commented on how good the food was and that they didn’t get to eat stuff like that at home. Before getting to try out these foods, many of the children used to tease me about my healthy eating choices, and a lot of parents told me that their kids would not eat foods like that.

The best teachers I have had were the ones who took the time to understand my dietary and other health issues and to make sure their classrooms were kind, inclusive, and respectful of individuals and cultures. The worst teachers were the ones who felt so pressured to complete the curriculum that they didn’t have time or interest in making sure all of us felt respected and included. We know that for all kids, following the diets and lifestyle that makes the most sense for them, keeps them the healthiest and most balanced physically and emotionally, and feeling the freedom and support to do so are tremendous factors in being healthy throughout their lives. Many kids with celiac and allergies eat foods they shouldn’t because of negative peer

pressure. They feel like their diets are “weird” when they have to sit through curricula that tells them what the best or ideal diets are.

I ask the bill sponsors and this committee the following questions:

- Because of the enormous size of these standards, how would individual preferences and needs be accounted for or really focused on? I know people always say they will, but in the interest of time, they rarely are in my experience.
- How do standards really meet students where their needs and realities are?
- Don't standards just give examples of more ways to fall short or get it wrong versus supporting kids in finding their own way and giving them the tools and opportunities to do so?
- Also, how will Ohio citizens have a voice in these standards if they are removed from legislature oversight with public hearings?
- With so much about education in question right now, why is this bill adding even more standards being dealt with?

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions, and I urge you to vote no and keep health curriculum in the legislature.