

OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF TIFFANIE BROADBENT

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and honorable members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Tiffanie Broadbent, I am a long-time resident of Ohio, currently living in Beachwood in Cuyahoga County. I graduated from Olentangy High School, not far from here in Delaware County, and received my Bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago. I'm a mother of two and a former educator, having held nearly every school position you could name, from classroom assistant to administrator, in seven different districts in four states, including Ohio.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon as a strong opponent of House Bill 73. Of particular concern to me is the change in end of year testing proposed in this bill, specifically the plan to consolidate the high school end-of-course exams in American History and American Government.

I'm a bit surprised to find myself here today because I would not normally be arguing to retain standardized tests. I would normally be standing with the people who want to do away with much of our testing, to work against a system that encourages "teaching to the test", because I know that approach usually diminishes genuine learning. So if this bill were about reducing the testing burden in our schools over all, across all content areas, I would feel differently. But this bill is not about reducing testing in all content areas.

I am concerned that condensing the American Government and American History tests into one will result in an overall reduction in the material being tested, and therefore will contribute to a devaluing of that material in the classroom a process that is already taking place in many districts, and which is dangerous to students and to our society.

Having worked in struggling districts, and having in fact been the Testing Coordinator at a charter school in the Collinwood neighborhood of East Cleveland, I can tell you that, for good or bad, many schools live and die on their test scores. For charter schools in particular, showing improvement on test scores is a big factor in the survival of the school. The teachers and administrators I knew had much nobler aims than mere test scores, but they knew that if they did not help their students perform better on the tests, then the school was in danger of being shut down. In struggling public districts (non-charterd), test scores can make the difference in retaining local control versus being administered by the state. When schools are facing consequences that drastic from testing achievement, they absolutely have to make testing their priority. If we keep other content area tests the same, but reduce the requirement by condensing these tests, I fear the result will be diminished commitment to these content areas because administrators have to emphasize first the scores that keep their doors open.

Not all schools are in this position, but all public schools do use test scores as part of the ecosystem of funding, reputation, and community support. I predict this change in testing will lead to three different reactions among teachers in most districts: There will be a group of teachers who will continue to teach our founding documents in the same way, either because

they believe in their importance, or they understand their statutory duty to teach them, regardless of test scores. A second group of teachers, realizing that their students will no longer be tested as thoroughly as before, will continue to teach our founding documents, but with less time and emphasis than they have in the past.

But there is another group of teachers who really concern me. Those are the teachers who are presently teaching our children that our founding documents are stained by the flaws of their authors, that our country is inherently racist, from its founding to its present, who denigrate our founding because we have been flawed in our execution of it. I am referring, of course, to the 1619 project curriculum. This curriculum, based on an ahistorical journalism project, directly conflicts with, and is diametrically and existentially opposed to, the import of the foundational documents which this statute requires be taught to our students. The upshot is that our children are being taught myth, or even propaganda, presented as history, and as such, this curriculum has no place in our schools, even according to most local school district policy manuals, which require that all information presented to the students be accurate.

There is an alarming trend of teacher activism and partisanship being pushed on our students under the guise of “action civics.” All too often, teachers and sometimes whole districts, push their own partisan political views on students and call it “Citizenship.” The teachers who teach our children from such a flawed and false curriculum, may see this bill as a signal that our state is warming to their ahistorical and derogatory views about our founding documents. I fear they will see this bill as permission to continue degrading the content they often openly despise.

What is the antidote to this misdirection? I would love to see us in Ohio move toward a more solid understanding of public education as strictly non-partisan and apolitical. This will require many more steps than we can approach today; but I worry that this bill will move us farther from that ideal.

I leave you with a final thought, as a former English teacher who had to fight tooth and nail to teach Martin Luther King and Frederick Douglass to my students in rural North Carolina:

What happens to Dr. King’s dream when we aren’t educating our children to be like Dr. King anymore? When our children can’t connect with him because we no longer give them the benefit of the wisdom he received through his relationship to our founding documents?

As much as some may wish to deny or rewrite our history, our greatest ideas have come to us through the cannon of Western wisdom that drove our Founders to create the system that is the birthright of every single American. It is our sacred trust to ensure that the principles of liberty, equality, and individual rights present in our founding documents, are still made vivid and important to our children. It is their birthright.

It would be a grave mistake to reduce the only method we have to determine whether or not teachers are actually teaching the documents and the concepts within those documents in a manner prescribed by the statute, and that is the achievement tests. That is why this

amendment must be rejected by this committee in whose hands the thinking of our children, our future leaders, will be molded. Thank you.