

# **YWCA IS ON A MISSION**

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YWCA Columbus  
Senate Bill 178 Opponent Testimony  
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee  
December 12, 2022**

Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for receiving my testimony, today. My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam, and I am writing on behalf of YWCA Columbus, to strongly urge a ‘no’ vote on Senate Bill 178, an overhaul of education powers in the state of Ohio.

YWCA Columbus is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and bring peace, justice, freedom and dignity to all. At the core of this mission comes our commitment to protecting democracy, course correcting our education systems through the voices of the people, and ensuring that Ohioans have a fair shot from the beginning. Our agency has been working on education issues at the State Board of Education for the past two years, chiefly to protect marginalized students at the intersections of race and gender. A part of the reason for shifting our advocacy focus to education is the blatant, strategic, and political attacks on K-12 education – indeed, there cannot be systems change without addressing the faults of our education system. However, education must first, and foremost, belong to Ohioans. The ability to make decisions over education through the power of the vote is an integral one; to put it plainly, Senate Bill 178 puts forth an inherently anti-Democratic stance over the issue of education.

A core legacy of our agency is our commitment to the vote. Expanding the ballot box, protecting the vote, and educating our community on important issues have all been ways we support our electoral system. Voting for school board members is one way our Ohio constitutions protects statewide education decisions; the appointed members protect the governor’s interests. Noting that YWCA itself has 13 associations across the state of Ohio – because we serve differing markets – it is incomprehensible to “streamline” education decisions into one non-publicly voted entity. The consolidation of education powers to a cabinet-level agency removes the direct ability of public involvement in the decisions that govern their districts, their schools, and their kids. Education belongs to the people of Ohio. Moving education powers to a centralized agency will remove education one further level away from the people of Ohio.

YWCA Columbus urges this body to consider the implications of removing democratic participation in education issues. At a time when our democracy seems to be under fire from every end, we see Senate Bill 178 as a measure that protects political interest over the will of the people. Instead, we urge our public bodies to look towards other ways to support education, including analyzing the systemic issues located in our education system which plague our marginalized students.

We will continue to support democratic measures over education, and look forward to having more conversations regarding this issue.

Thank you,

Lalitha Pamidigantam, Advocacy Manager