



May 13, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sarah Kaka. I am an Assistant Professor of Education at Ohio Wesleyan University, and a 20-year veteran of social studies education, having first taught as a high school social studies teacher for 10 years prior to making the shift to higher education. I speak to you today as the Vice President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS), and an active member of the Ohio Professors of Social Studies Education Special Interest Group (SIG). Members of the SIG are social studies methods instructors in teacher preparation programs across Ohio. I also speak to you today as a mother of 2 daughters, one in 7th grade, and one in 4th grade, and both in public schools in Ohio.

Thank you for the time you have invested in this vital topic. The Ohio Council for the Social Studies is grateful for your time and attention to such an important matter.

Today, I am testifying as an Opponent of House Bill 103. While the bill only creates a task force, this task force will be tasked with implementing the *American Birthright Standards*. I come to you today to assist you in having a deeper understanding of just one of the many unintended consequences of these standards being implemented here in Ohio.

It was Thomas Jefferson who said that education is the key to democracy and the sustainability of our country; a vital component of his vision is the skills that come from learning in a social studies classroom under Ohio's current social studies standards. The complete removal of all skills, especially those related to critical thinking, undermine Jefferson's vision of our country. On pg. 20 of the *American Birthright Standards*, it actually states "*American Birthright* includes no concepts or skills... Teachers should not waste precious classroom hours on mandated skills instruction." While OCSS is wholeheartedly in favor of allowing for teachers' instructional autonomy, the teaching of higher-order thinking skills is essential and at the heart of social studies. Critical reading, analyzing a primary source, sourcing and contextualization of documents and media, providing evidentiary warrants to build and refute arguments, and leveraging collaboration and communication skills to solve programs are all skills that are essential to the future success of our democracy.

The current standards, which have been vetted by Ohio social studies educators and professors, include the necessary skills to set Ohioans up for a successful future—historical thinking, spatial thinking, civic participation and engagement, economic decision-making, and financial literacy are all broad categories of skills woven throughout the current standards. It is the presence of



these skills that have led to American History and American Government consistently having the [highest end-of-course test scores](#) over any other content area, which test students abilities to meet the current social studies standards, which includes all of those skills listed above. These courses include the founding documents and principles, as outlined in the standards as well, after being incorporated in 2012 as reflected in Section 3301.079 of the Ohio Revised Code.

In fact, the National Council for the Social Studies [released recommendations](#) in June of 2021 to help states develop state social studies standards. They include a set of criteria that must drive the creation and revision of standards. One of these criteria focuses on analysis. It says “Do the standards/indicators ask students to demonstrate advanced thinking processes such as synthesizing, interpreting, evaluating, and hypothesizing? Are these skills situated within social studies content?” There is a clear lack of this specific criterion throughout the *American Birthright Standards*—because they are solely focused on content, there are no opportunities for students to demonstrate any advanced thinking concepts. And research has found over and over again that content-based, teacher-centered social studies classes lead to a decrease in engagement, rigor and student academic achievement. It is the presence of higher-order thinking skills, civic engagement, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning that increase all of those things and make learning student-centered and relevant.

Additionally, this bill would handcuff college and university-based Ohio teacher preparation programs in their responsibility to meet accreditation standards. HB 103 will make Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) reviews and compliance impossible, having significant consequences on national program recognition and state (in and outside of Ohio) educator licensing. In order to fully license teachers, teacher preparation programs have to go through an accreditation process through the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) every 7 years. There are currently 49 colleges and universities in the state of Ohio that are accredited by ODHE to prepare secondary social studies teachers.

The ODHE, in consultation with CAEP, accredits teacher preparation programs that are able to show, through data and analysis of key program assessments, they are meeting the National Council for the Social Studies’ *Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers*.

Standard 4 requires that teacher preparation programs prepare candidates to teach their students to be informed advocates for an inclusive and equitable society. Element 4c specifically requires that teacher preparation programs prepare candidates to engage learners in ethical reasoning to deliberate social, political, and economic issues, communicate conclusions, and take informed action toward achieving a more inclusive and equitable society.



Similarly, Standard 5 requires that teacher preparation programs prepare candidates to reflect and expand upon their social studies knowledge, inquiry skills, and civic dispositions to advance social justice and promote human rights through informed action in schools and/or communities. This is the very goal of social studies.

It goes beyond secondary social studies, though, as the CAEP Elementary Standards, the ones that institutions have to meet to prepare elementary teachers, has a social studies-specific standard. Standard 2.d - “Candidates demonstrate understandings, capabilities, and practices associated with the central concepts and tools in Civics, Economics, Geography, and History, within a framework of informed inquiry.” The very heart of inquiry-based learning is tackling challenging questions that allow students to see multiple, varied perspectives.

These standards are met through assessment data that is collected while students are in a field experience or student teaching, which requires them to be in a school in Ohio actively meeting these standards. If this bill is passed and these standards are enforced, the standards I cited above will no longer be able to be met by Ohio’s teacher preparation programs because it requires student teachers to do two things the *American Birthright Standards* prohibit: 1) using inquiry-based learning techniques, and 2) engaging students in social justice and advocacy work (see pg 25 of ABS section on Pedagogies). The removal, and clear prohibition, of these two items from the K-12 social studies curriculum will result in the state of Ohio no longer having nationally or state accredited teacher preparation programs, as programs will be unable to train social studies educators in compliance with CAEP standards.

This bill cheats students of a quality education and instead promotes an incomplete, inadequate, reductive education that shuns intellectual curiosity and closes minds rather than expanding them. At the end of the day, HB 103 will leave our students ill-equipped to thrive as civically engaged, democratic citizens of our globally connected world.

Sarah J. Kaka, PhD
Vice President, Ohio Council for the Social Studies
Assistant Professor of Education and Department Chair
Director, Adolescence to Young Adult and Multi-Age Teacher Education Programs
Ohio Wesleyan University
[740-368-3563](tel:740-368-3563) | sjkaka@owu.edu