

**OPPONENT TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO
HOUSE PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Testimony of Dr. Brad M. Maguth
House Bill 103: Establish Ohio Social Studies Standards Task Force

Tuesday, May 16th, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you, for allowing me to submit written testimony as a steadfast Opponent of House Bill 103, as currently written.

My name is Brad Maguth and I am grateful to be speaking with you today as a private citizen on this matter. In addition to serving as Professor of Social Studies Education at The University of Akron, I am also the Past President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies. Outside of these appointments, I have authored and edited over fifty publications centered on the teaching and learning of K16 history and social studies education. It has been a pleasure to serve in advisory capacities with state and national elected representatives and nonprofits, including the National Council for the Social Studies, on the teaching of history and social studies in our communities and classrooms. I hope we can all agree a robust and high-quality social studies education is paramount to preparing youth for this nation's highest office, that of the Office of Citizen in a democracy. There is no subject more central in protecting and sustaining our great Republic, a government of the People, by the People, and for the People.

In the past year and a half, there have been around 20 proposed bills introduced in the Ohio Legislature seeking to alter, edit, mandate, and even criminalize the teaching of history or social studies content. Ohio's social studies teachers are too often caught in the crossfires of these political exchanges. After all, social studies is already, by far, the most micro-managed curriculum in the state, when compared to other core subject areas. You will also notice almost none of the recently introduced bills include state appropriations for investing in social studies teacher training and curricular resources. Despaired and demoralized elementary, middle, and secondary social studies teachers have become accustomed to such neglect, injury, and disregard for their discipline. For instance, did you know social studies is the only core subject area in the State of Ohio without any funded K thru grade 8 state assessments? In the past ten years, how much has the Ohio Legislature truly invested in the teaching of civics, geography, history, and even economics when compared to reading and math? All of this at a time when the classroom teaching of history and social studies has never been harder.

The sponsors in their opening testimony on May 2nd, by their admission, note the *American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards* sets out to teach learners what, and not the process of how, to think. In my professional opinion, which is rooted in both educational research and history, such a curricular approach is misguided and deeply dangerous to our democracy. Ohio's social studies standards must leverage both content and skills, advancing inquiry over blind consumption and indoctrination. With an overwhelming clarion call, the nation's most

highly respected learned societies in history and social studies education, such as the American Historical Society, the National Council for Teaching History, and the National Council for the Social Studies, find the American Birthright standard as detrimental and destructive to the goals of social studies. The Ohio Council for the Social Studies, the state's largest network of K-16 social studies classroom teachers, notes the passage of this bill would only inject unnecessary and injurious partisan politics into the social studies curriculum- at a time when our state and nation can ill afford a subversion away from teaching both the content and habits of mind associated with citizenship in our great American democracy. Youth must be prepared to think critically, analyze and contextual sources, and apply learnings to make themselves, their household, their community, our state, our country, and our world better. None of Ohio's major professional teacher associations or unions even support referencing or using the discredited American Birthright social studies standards, which are enthusiastically written into this bill as an applicable framework.

Instead of being overhauled, the current ODE learning standards development and revision process should be commended for its rigor, professionalism, inclusivity, voice, and transparency. It has been my pleasure to join Ohio's K12 classroom teachers to volunteer to serve on several iterations of social studies standards and model curriculum revision committees. In no way is the current ODE writing or revision processes weaponized against a single subject area, like HB 103 does against K12 social studies. The current ODE process is applied equitably across all subjects to ensure rigorous, relevant, and robust learning standards. The existing process enlists professional educators and subject area experts and stakeholders in both working and advisory groups. After multiple rounds of public comment and revision from educators, parents, and community members, the drafted standards go to the State School Board of Ohio for additional review, scrutiny, and eventual approval. House Bill 103, as currently written, would strip and derail this refined and exemplary writing and revision process. If passed, trained professional classroom teachers, those most impacted by Ohio's learning standards, would be left out of standards development and the decision process altogether. In their place, professional educators would be replaced with untrained partisans that spend little time if any in Ohio's K12 social studies classrooms teaching learners.

In conclusion, this appears to be a crafted bill in search of a problem. I ask that this Committee, which is tasked in part with listening to and responding to the needs of the State's unsung heroes, its K12 teachers, to forgo this bill and instead tackle a more urgent and pressing problem; namely, the need to invest in Ohio's civic education first responders, its social studies teachers. We would welcome this show of confidence for our profession, as we set out to inspire the next wave of public servants and problem-solvers. Instead of performative political measures that if passed would harm learners' civic understanding and agency, I ask that you instead tackle the state's deferred investment in high-quality social studies teacher training and supplies. This need is especially great in the elementary grades. Such investments would ensure all of Ohio's learners are best prepared to undertake the essential work of sustaining and strengthening our democracy in these trying times.

As a lifelong Buckeye, and for the reasons outlined above, I believe in an Ohio that is better than what is currently written in this bill.

Thank you, Chair Bird and members of the committee for your consideration of my testimony. I ask that you oppose House Bill 103.