

OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (OEA)
OHIO HOUSE EDUCATION PRIMARY & SECONDARY COMMITTEE
HB 103 – OPPONENT TESTIMONY

MAY 16, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Bird, ranking member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee. My name is Matthew Dotson with OEA Government Relations. On behalf of the OEA, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

HB 103 proposes a nine-member Ohio Social Studies Task Force which must develop statewide academic standards in social studies for grades K-12 based on “American Birthright: The Civics Alliance’s Model K-12 Social Studies Standards.” The HB 103 social studies task force is then required to report the standards to the Ohio General Assembly for approval before the standards would take effect.

OEA opposes HB 103 for the following reasons:

- HB 103 does not meet the standards of Social Studies teachers. According to the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS), the American Birthright standards do not align with best practices related to the development of social studies standards. Neither the OCSS nor the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) endorses or supports the use of these standards.
- HB 103 is divisive. Resolutions adopted by OEA members urge the inclusion in school standards of an awareness of the contributions which people of all cultures and backgrounds have made in history. In contrast, the NCSS views the American Birthright standards as an “attempt to return to a time when United States social studies classrooms presented a single narrative of U.S. and Western history that glorified selected aspects of history while minimizing the experiences, contributions, and perspectives indigenous peoples, people of color, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, the working class, and countless others.”
- HB 103 is a distraction. The American Birthright standards have been criticized for being used as a tool to confuse the ideological views of adults with the learning needs of students. Distracting educators with political conflicts is not in the best interest of students.

The recent experience of the state of Colorado with the American Birthright movement illuminates the above concerns. After controversy erupted in one Colorado school district over the implementation of these standards, the Colorado State Board of Education voted against adopting the American Birthright social studies standards (which had been proposed by a commission that had spent a year and a half revising Colorado's social studies standards to reflect American Birthright content).

The rejection of the American Birthright program in Colorado was the culmination of an outside effort initiated in response to a 2021 Fordham Institute report titled "The State of State Standards in Civics and U.S. History." The Fordham report rated Colorado's social studies standards as "inadequate." In contrast, the same Fordham report rated the social studies standards of California and Massachusetts as "exemplary," New York as "good/exemplary." Ohio was rated as "good/mediocre."

In conclusion, the American Birthright standards have been subject to consistent criticism in a variety of areas, such as use of outdated language, apparent ideological motives, and promotion of content/approaches that do not align with the recommendations of those with experience teaching and studying the social studies.

Of most concern, the American Birthright standards are criticized for seeking to narrow social studies standards to tell one separate story, instead of our united story. OEA recommends that the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Committee not take this path.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.