

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: May 15, 2023

Name: Steve Couch

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): _____

Position/Title: teacher

Address: 6444 Center St.

City: Mentor State: OH Zip: 44060

Best Contact Telephone: 440-477-5281 Email: stevecouch@windstream.net

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 103

Specific Issue: social studies K-12 standards

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Are you testifying: In-Person Written-Only

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? _____

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

My name is Steve Couch, and I have been an Ohio social studies educator for the last thirty years. I graduated proudly in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Studies Education from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio where I also served as President of the Miami Council for the Social Studies. I served on the executive board of the Ohio Council of the Social Studies as a student member and have presented at both

their conference and also for the annual National Council for the Social Studies conference. I earned a Master's Degree in History from Cleveland State University and have taught both regular and AP classes. I am a teacher who has been awarded for my work at the local level as the VFW District 7, Ohio Teacher of the Year and the Cleveland Council for World Affairs Teacher of the Year, at the regional level as a Northeast Ohio Education Association (NEOEA) Positive Image Award winner, at the state level with special recognition from the Ohio General Assembly, and at the national level as the Phyllis Layton Perry Educator of the Year for the National Council on International Visitors. I have taught in both public and private school settings.

I am offering written testimony in opposition to House Bill 103. This bill is opposed by the Ohio Education Association (OEA), and the "American Birthright" standards which it empowers are wholly opposed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The NCSS - the premier organization for social studies educators in America - in a rare September 2022 statement opposed the "American Birthright" standards as developed by the Civics Alliance as "damaging," having "a clear political motive," and possessing "content and approaches to social studies and history education that do not align with those recommended by experts in social studies content areas."

To see what impact HB 103 could have on this state, one need only consider what is happening in Woodland Park, Colorado in the one public school district nationwide that has chosen to adopt this curriculum. As reported nationally by NBC News, this district is in a fairly conservative part of the state that the newly elected conservative school board likely concluded would appreciate such a curriculum. But the reality is that the adoption of the "American Birthright" curriculum there has resulted in chaos. Opposition to so-called "social-emotional learning" caused the superintendent there to fail to reapply for grants that secure counselors and social workers for the district. Four top administrators have quit, and up to 40% of the high school staff says they do not intend to return despite 8% raises granted to the staff. A course created as a part of a national suicide prevention program was cancelled, and any curriculum that discussed "social strife" was to be de-emphasized. No social studies teachers were consulted prior to the adoption of the curriculum, and many have been administratively harassed or have departed the district. The board also has been dogged by accusations of lack of transparency, any meaningful parental input, and holding meetings in private in violation of Colorado law that should have been public. The community has been roiled by dissent, and this in a community that voted for President Trump by a 2-1 margin. The standards were created with input from conservative groups such as Moms for Liberty and the Family Research Council with no input from social studies educators. It was enacted locally despite being rejected by the Colorado State Board of Education.

Is this really the type of tactics, controversy, and level of critical thinking that Ohio wishes to bring here?

Apparently so. While Woodland Park is a cautionary tale, that is just one school district in the entire state. Ohio legislators through HB 103 apparently wish to double and triple down on this approach by bringing it to every public school classroom statewide, K-12. HB 103 essentially throws out the entire social studies curriculum developed with input from educators and citizens and replaces it with a partisan interpretation rejected by every professional organization that should have had meaningful input in its creation.

Not only that, HB 103 takes the power plays and lack of transparency in Woodland Park and makes the Ohio version worse still - creating a 9-person board to create these new standards in place of the State Board of Education or ODE. The board would be composed of members wholly appointed by elected officials - the governor, the Senate president, and the Speaker of the House - all of whom at this writing are safely in Republican hands. HB 103 takes the worst aspects of Senate Bill 83 and brings them down to the K-12 level, governing every conversation by every teacher in every social studies classroom in the Buckeye state.

At a time when schools are struggling to fill positions with qualified teachers, this is bad policy at an extraordinarily bad time. It will be disastrous for the education of millions of students in our state, and therefore for the future of our citizenry. It takes the concept of local control in public education out of the hands of elected representatives and replaces it with top-down directives from partisan, elected officials in Columbus. It is wholly inconsistent with the qualities of a strong social studies education that our students need.

In all my years of public education, I have never been more disheartened at the state of education in this state - and none of it is a result of my colleagues or my students. The general assembly of Ohio will make social studies teaching in this state untenable and a quality education unachievable if HB 103 passes. If the General Assembly truly wishes to remake public education, they should fully fund it, leave the State Board of Education alone, and stop proposing bills like HB 103.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.