



December 10, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Arthur 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 Associate 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 8th grade, and one in 5th 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 a proponent of House Bill 171. This bill will transform social studies education for Ohio's students. Research has shown that students who see themselves in the curriculum are more likely to thrive. They are typically more energized, more likely to spend time on-task, and more likely to choose to be in the school environment. When students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, it can increase their educational success and motivational outcomes in multiple ways. One way to do this is to ensure that all of Ohio's students see themselves in the curriculum by learning about the history of people with their shared race, ethnicity, culture, or religion. Ohio's classrooms are more diverse than ever before. While 66% of Ohio's K-12 public school students are white, 34% of them are not, and they do not currently see themselves integrated intentionally throughout the curriculum since our current social studies model curriculum does not reflect this diversity.

HB 171 will address this issue head-on: students from African American communities; Asian American and Pacific Islander communities; Arab, African, and North African immigrant, refugee, and asylee communities; Appalachian communities; Jewish communities; Latin American communities; and Native American communities will all be represented in the new model curriculum. This content will allow students to recognize themselves, their way of life, and the contributions of their shared identities within the fabric of our history and as a valued



contributor within society. This is vital to the success of most non-white students, as research clearly shows.

Regarding local control, something that OCSS knows is very important to schools in Ohio, this bill would not mandate or impose anything on local school districts. HB 171 will update the model curricula to provide support and guidance for Ohio school districts and educators who have a desire to educate and engage Ohio's students on the histories of the peoples who already call Ohio home.

This bill is also cost neutral, and will not create an additional financial burden, as this content will simply be included in the next revision of Ohio's social studies model curriculum. This is the ideal time to add content that will inevitably make all of Ohio's students more knowledgeable about the world around them. Educators are constantly being asked to ensure that they are providing their students with a well-rounded body of historical knowledge, and this will truly aid teachers in doing just that. On behalf of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies, I ask that you seriously consider passing HB 171 since it is in the best interest of Ohio's students.

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