

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Katherine Zak
Testifying as Proponent

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Katie Zak, I live in Brecksville, and I am the Social Studies instructional specialist for Akron Public Schools. I am an educator and I am asking this committee to support H.B. 171, which updates the Social Studies model curriculum to better reflect the histories of all Ohioans by including the migration histories, societal contributions and experiences of a range of communities in Ohio and the United States who are not currently represented in our classrooms.

For Ohio students to have a learning experience that is inclusive of the richly diverse population that comprises the state, there must be a robust Social Studies curriculum that reflects this. As Ohio's 2020 census results¹ show, our state continues to welcome thousands of new residents² who bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experiences. As we work to better prepare our students for global citizenship and interconnectedness, highlighting the diversity of the new experiences brought to our state reflects the current identified best practices in education.³ Students who see themselves in their learning, especially minority students, are more likely to not only feel a greater sense of belonging, but also show a higher efficacy throughout their educational journey - from higher school graduation rates to increased standardized testing pass rates and probability of pursuing post-secondary education.⁴ Based on all of these incredible increases in indicators that Ohio's education systems desire to see in its students, there is no doubt that the passage of H.B. 171 in its current form stands to benefit not only Ohio students, but the state's continued development as a standard for American education.

As a product of Ohio's education system, I am sad to say that there are many incredible opportunities for multicultural learning that I was not provided because it was not included in Ohio's Social Studies model curriculum. This includes many proud moments of history that happened right here in Ohio; one such example that I learned about more recently and have become involved in raising awareness around is the fact that Sojourner Truth, famed abolitionist and women's rights activist, gave her infamous *Ain't I A Woman* speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851.⁵ I've learned so much about the wider world mainly through my own curiosity (encouraged by teachers and trusted adults who saw this in me early on in my educational journey), but this is not something students may be encouraged to do or even know where to begin searching for more knowledge. This is the type of diversity in our Social Studies curriculum that will help to drive the efficacy that we desire from Ohio's students today.

Finally, H.B. 171 has the backing from many of Ohio's teachers and is being endorsed by the Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and the Ohio Council of the Social Studies.

I respectfully urge the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote yes in support of H.B. 171. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Katherine Zak

Katherine Zak

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Ohio: 2020 Census*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/ohio-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

² Immigrants in Ohio. American Immigration Council. (2020, August).

https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_ohio.pdf

³ Sleeter, C. E., & Zavala, M. (2020, October 15). *What the Research Says About Ethnic Studies*. National Education Association.

<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/what-research-says-about-ethnic-studies>

⁴ Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 127–166. <https://doi.org/10.3102/000283121667700>

⁵ Sojourner truth memorial plaza: National Trust for Historic Preservation. Sojourner Truth Memorial Plaza | National Trust for Historic Preservation. (2022). <https://savingplaces.org/places/sojourner-truth>