

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Wesley McDonald and Ruijia Hu
Testifying as Proponent

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

Our names are Wesley McDonald and Ruijia Hu, we live in Cincinnati, and I am a concerned citizen but my partner, Ruijia is an educator and student at the University of Cincinnati. I am asking this committee to support HB 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.

I, Wesley, believe that passing this bill is good for Ohio and Ohio students because as a student growing up in Ohio, I was taught a curriculum in history that largely focused on:

- Early European migration
- The slave trade
- The impacts of American colonization Westward in harming indigenous communities
- The Industrial Revolution
- The wars in which the United States participated throughout the 20th century
- The Civil Rights Movement
- The Cold War into modern times (modern being ~ 2006 when I graduated in 2009)

This bill would shift the focus away from a conceptual “American History”, which is largely European-dominated, and instead showcase the contributions of various ethnic groups participating in the American experiment. The curriculum in our schools doesn’t encourage us to see all people as American because students aren’t taught of the contributions and impacts that those communities outlined in HB 171 have made to American Society, or their immigration journeys (IE: Chinese Immigrations to the USA between 1849-1882). Our education system needs to incorporate the contributions of various ethnic groups and help students develop a more accurate understanding of our shared history. The student population in Ohio schools is becoming increasingly diverse, and it’s crucial that our education system acknowledges this diversity.

Education is not only about imparting knowledge but also about shaping values and attitudes. The current education standards teach us that there are historic “Americans” that you learn about in schools and “others” who are immigrating here in the modern day. I believe there is a disconnect between the reality of immigration and history in the United States and what students are taught in schools about what being an American is. This leads to a division in our communities and feelings of exclusion.

My partner, Ruijia Hu, was one of the many victims of this disconnect. During the early days of the COVID-19 lockdowns, when fear and suspicion of Asian Americans were nearing their height, she was approached by teenagers in our local Kroger and accused of spreading the virus or being contagious because of her appearance. Before she opens her mouth to speak my

partner is placed into this “other” category due to her appearance and is assumed to be non-American as a result. For a while she did not feel safe traveling alone in this city because of this perceived “otherness” and how she may be treated. She, like many others in Cincinnati (and Ohio generally), has come to this city from East Asia and should be fully welcome here, it’s the American way.

These changes are also needed because being “American” is based on a set of ideals and dreams, not on your family origin. A story from 2021 concerning Lee Wong of West Chester Township stands out where he felt the need to show his scars gained while serving in the military to prove his “Americanness”. He is a respected member of his community, less than twenty minutes from where I live in Cincinnati, and he felt this need because people perceived him as an “other” due to his accent and appearance. I fear that, if our education curriculum is not changed, my future children may also be perceived as an “other” or an outsider to what is understood to be “American” in the current day.

We hope that with a more robust education curriculum encompassing the groups outlined in HB 171 we can promote empathy, understanding, and mutual respect among students and contribute to a more tolerant and inclusive Ohio. We believe this feeling of “otherness” can be eliminated and we can stop dividing our communities by our perceived “Americanness”. Ultimately, it is an ignorance of American history that leads to this perception. Education that incorporates the histories of these communities could cure this ignorance and change the relationship between the many communities that coexist within our nation.

We request that you vote yes for bill HB 171. The curriculum, as it stands from the Ohio Department of Education, does not represent the changing face of American society or even accurately represent the full scope of immigration to America throughout our history. By updating the curriculum we will allow all students to feel part of the history of this country.

Thank you,

Wesley McDonald and Ruijia Hu