

**Testimony for HB 171**  
**Submitted by: Faten Odeh**  
**CAIR-Ohio- Council on American-Islamic Relations, Ohio**  
**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 Faten Odeh, I live in Parma, and I am the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Ohio, and 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 believe that passing this bill is good for Ohio and Ohio students because I can speak from personal experience, first as a Palestinian Muslim American, and second, as a former educator of social studies. As a student, it was devastating when my peers could not understand where I came from or the contributions my culture and faith had made to the world. This lack of understanding due to the absence of my history in the school curriculum contributed to targeted bullying, xenophobia and Islamophobia. It was difficult having to explain that my existence and my people's existence was and still is, an asset to the development of the entire world. As anyone who has had children or taught children knows, the importance of identity and understanding one's self-worth is vital to the mental and emotional development of every human being. As an adult, I chose the field of education and in particular social studies so that I may teach the students what I wish I had been taught growing up but unfortunately, I was limited to following the Ohio state curriculum and preparing my students for the state exams. Oftentimes, students felt like there was little value in learning history and social studies because they thought it had nothing to do with who they are. We know the world could not have gotten as far as we have without the contributions of all societies, so why is this not evident in our social

studies curriculum? An updated model curriculum would **provide rich, engaging options for teaching and learning social studies** in Ohio. It will equip teachers with activities and lessons that can support and develop respect for the students in our classrooms who come from different backgrounds than our own. Students are also more engaged when they see their communities reflected in the classroom. It's important that our students **can connect to the information** that they're learning in school.

- A 2020 study from the National Education Association shows us that students of color, in particular, who participated in courses that reflected different identities, cultures, and backgrounds had a greater sense of belonging and sense of self.
- H.B. 171 **takes advantage of the existing curriculum review process**, providing options and enriching the guidance used by our education experts to continue developing the best curriculum for Ohio's students.
- We fail our kids when we don't provide them with an education that truly **mirrors Ohio's current makeup as a state**. H.B. 171 can solve for that by educating students about the experiences, migration, and contributions of a range of communities that already, and in many cases, have long called Ohio home.
- H.B. 171 has the backing and support of the **vast majority of Ohio teachers**, with endorsements from Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and 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,

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