



Proponent Testimony of: Amina Barhumi
House Bill 171
December 11, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Bird, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Amina Barhumi, and I am the Executive Director at the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, Columbus & Cincinnati offices—more commonly known as CAIR-Ohio. We advocate for American Muslims' rights through pro-bono legal services and education, and we support HB 171, recognizing its broad backing, as it mirrors the cultural richness of Ohio and promises a well-rounded education.

The American Muslim community is diverse, comprising individuals from various ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Integrating cultural discussions into the curriculum fosters curiosity, support, and appreciation for classmates from different backgrounds. This approach enhances student engagement, encouraging them to connect with topics that resonate with their own experiences. Students thrive when exposed to familiar stories.

As a mother, faith leader, youth worker, and educator, I've witnessed firsthand the positive impact of culturally responsive education. My son was initially embarrassed and withdrawn when he started public school. I was invited to speak to his class about fasting in Ramadan, and the holiday celebration of Eid Fitr (the breaking of the fast). Through our family's Lebanese, Syrian Muslim background—the tradition of sharing of meals together with extended relatives, I noticed how it boosted his self-esteem and enabled his classmates to recognize the rich heritage of our American Muslim story. Beautiful conversations with peers and teachers allowed for connection. The cohesiveness of the classroom allowed for a better environment for all students. I emphasize the transformative effect of culturally relevant discussions on his self-esteem and social interactions.

Countless parents, families, and teachers share the goal of creating culturally responsive classrooms. The shared aspiration is to equip students with the skills they need for future endeavors, contributing positively to society as professionals, entrepreneurs, and workers. HB 171 is seen as a tool to equip students with a more comprehensive understanding of the world. Exposure to diverse perspectives fosters critical thinking skills and the ability to view issues and world problems from multiple angles. When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their sense of identity and belonging strengthen, leading to higher levels of engagement, motivation, and academic success. This positive self-perception translates into a more confident and engaged classroom atmosphere. HB 171 is viewed as a solution to the current curriculum gaps, ensuring it fully reflects all the communities that make Ohio home.

Preparedness for Ohio's future workforce begins in the classroom. HB 171 is viewed as a tool to equip students with the tools, understanding, and knowledge needed to navigate the global economy, preparing them for their future endeavors. As representatives and stakeholders, we share the common goal of providing all Ohio students with a high-quality education that recognizes and celebrates diversity. HB 171 is seen as a crucial step towards achieving this goal, shaping a more inclusive and enriching educational experience for all Ohio students. Thank you for your consideration.