

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Ms. Ingram as well as esteemed committee members, my name is Amber Dittmar and I live in Zanesville Ohio. I am an employee of the Tri-Valley Local School District in Dresden, Ohio. It has been my distinct honor to be an educator for ten years. I teach language arts and social studies to sixth grade students and I have always taught at the middle school level. I often hear notes of sympathy from people when I talk about teaching the middle grade bands.

Regardless of most public sentiment, I know this is my calling and my place, for I feel that this is such a pivotal time in a child's development. The nature and needs of middle school students are so unique from any other age group. It is a significant time in an adolescent's life and I am so thankful that I can influence, inspire, and interact daily with my sixth grade students.

One of the big ideas I always try to impress on my students is that education is your ticket. It is your mechanism to realize your dreams, overcome your misfortunes, and discover new adventures. I believe in our public education system. I believe in the heart of those that I work shoulder to shoulder with daily. However, the current climate in society has introduced fear into educators and doubt about our freedoms. This is why HB 214 is an important step in alleviating fears for current and future educators regarding our academic privilege. Furthermore, HB 214 also keeps decision making where it should be in education, at the local level. Just as we differentiate for each student, each district should have the autonomy to provide protected speech conditions for their educators and not have this mandated at the state level.

Another driving concept that I impart to my students is the idea of civic competence. This is at the core of social studies education, to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good. At the nucleus of HB 214 is the intent of freedom. Educators should be free to have classrooms that welcome the exchange of ideas and viewpoints. This is at the heart of our republic. HB 214 promotes independent thought and does not force students or educators to be of one like mind, but to demonstrate the freedom to endorse ideologies, political movements or social action without fear of ramifications. Or in the transverse, not forced to adopt tenets contrary to our conscience for fear of losing our position, obtaining a poor job rating, or being passed by for another educational opportunity.

In conclusion, I felt compelled to speak as a proponent of HB 214 today as a spokesperson for teachers. As I thought further about this, it is not necessarily teachers that I am advocating for today, it is my students. Not only the 40 that I have in my classroom today, but the hundreds that have gone before and hopefully, the hundreds to come.