



## **Testimony for House Bill 117**

**State Representative Tracy Richardson, District 86**

**House Education Committee**

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Good morning Chairwoman Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on our bill, the Pledge of Allegiance Act.

Many of us grew up saying the Pledge of Allegiance each morning as we began our school day. In my public elementary school, it was an honor and a privilege for a student picked to lead the Pledge of Allegiance as part of morning school announcements. Until recently, like many of you, I believed all students were reciting the Pledge daily in our schools. Unfortunately, not all schools in Ohio practice this tradition. Currently, the law allows local school districts to create and publish their own policy which has resulted in students who simply never learn our Pledge. HB117 seeks to change this.

Hanging on the wall in the family room of my home are the framed and mounted words of the Pledge of Allegiance. It is surrounded by a flag of Ohio, and is part of a red, white, and blue decor including pillows, U.S. flags and a mounted USA soccer team emblem. The reason for this is that our family is not only grateful to live in Ohio, but we also know that we are blessed to live in the greatest country in the world. My children have been raised with national symbols and the American values that the Pledge represents. Unfortunately, some students have limited, if any, such exposure or experience. Love of country motivated me to draft HB117 with a desire to ensure that Ohio students have the opportunity to learn the Pledge of Allegiance.

HB117 aims to ensure that all students K-12 can recite the Pledge of Allegiance each day. The Pledge of Allegiance is a pledge to our flag which is a symbol of our fifty states joining to become one country. Reciting our Pledge builds patriotism, unity, and nationalism by promising to be faithful to our American values. At a time when many seem polarized, the Pledge of Allegiance is a meaningful tradition that brings all Americans together.

The Pledge of Allegiance is an essential element of civics education because it teaches students to appreciate our nation's flag as a symbol of freedom, loyalty, and justice. It is important that our students learn both the language and lessons expressed in the Pledge of Allegiance so that this national tradition may continue for generations to come in Ohio.

HB117 contains the following provisions:

1. **Adoption of Policy:** Each school district's board of education will be required to adopt a policy establishing a specific time and manner for the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. **Constitutional Protections:** The policy will emphasize that no person shall be required to participate in the recitation, and no one's constitutional rights shall be infringed upon in the process.
3. **Integrity of the Pledge:** No school board or employee shall alter the words of the Pledge of Allegiance from the version set forth in 4 U.S.C. 4.
4. **Encouragement of Civics Education:** The bill encourages schools and teachers to develop lessons that foster understanding of the American flag and the Pledge of Allegiance as part of promoting excellent citizenship skills.
5. **Transparency and Accessibility:** Each district board will be required to make its adopted policy publicly available and post it on its website if one exists.

HB 117 promotes patriotism and civic engagement while protecting individual and constitutionally guaranteed rights. We believe this legislation will have a positive impact on both students and educators in Ohio and hope it will inspire national unity.

I will be followed by my joint sponsor Rep Brennan who was also a beloved teacher here in Ohio.