

WILLARD CITY SCHOOLS

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May 17, 2025

Proponent Testimony on HB117

Presented by Jeffery R. Ritz
Superintendent, Willard City Schools

Chairman: Representative Sarah Fowler Arthur
Vice Chairman: Representative Mike Odioso
Ranking Member: Representative Phillip M. Robinson, Jr.
Members of the Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 117. My name is Jeffery Ritz, and I am honored to serve as the Superintendent of Willard City Schools in Huron County, Ohio. I am speaking not only as an educational leader but as someone who has witnessed firsthand the profound impact of daily patriotic practices on students, families, and communities.

Throughout my 35-year career in education, I have served in three different school districts—each one demonstrating a deep respect for our country and our flag. For the first nine years of my career, I taught in Stafford, Virginia, where many of the students I served had parents who worked at Quantico, the Pentagon, or in Washington, D.C. Patriotism was more than just a lesson—it was woven into the fabric of our daily school life. Students understood from an early age the sacrifices made by those who serve our nation, and we honored that commitment every day.

When I relocated back to Ohio, I was fortunate to find myself in a community that shared these same values. At Willard City Schools, our commitment to honoring our country, our flag, and those who serve is a daily priority. We have proudly been recognized multiple times as a Purple Star School District, reflecting our dedication to supporting military-connected families.

Our Honor Committee, led by our dedicated educators—Courtney Carnahan, Cathy Weaver, Jason Ratliff, and Tiffany Nuhfer—has worked tirelessly to guide our district and community in numerous efforts to pay respects to our veterans and active service members, including:

- Annual Veterans Day assemblies are attended by students in K-12, staff, and the community.
- Military Appreciation Nights during football and basketball games.
- Hometown Hero Banner Program, which honors local veterans.
- In partnership with the City of Willard, we contributed to the repainting of our city water tower in red, white, and blue, standing as a prominent salute to our veterans.

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- Wreaths Across America wreath placement, ensuring our local cemeteries are adorned with symbols of respect.
- Strong partnerships with our local American Legion, including flag placement on veterans' graves.
- Honor Flight and Honor Flight Guardians support.
- Sponsoring and participating in the Huron County Honor Bus, providing our students opportunities to engage with veterans.
- We are currently in the planning and design phase of a local veteran's memorial, in partnership with the City of Willard.

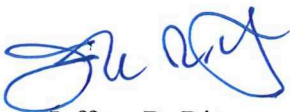
These events are powerful and meaningful. However, the daily reinforcement of respect and patriotism comes each morning when a member of our Student Council leads the entire student body in the Pledge of Allegiance over the school PA system. This simple yet profound act sets the tone for the day and ensures that our students, regardless of their backgrounds, understand the values of unity, respect, and gratitude toward our nation and those who serve it.

Our district serves a diverse population, including approximately 20% English Language Learners, 14% students with special needs, and 67% living in poverty. Despite these challenges, or perhaps because of them, the Pledge of Allegiance and the rituals of honoring our flag and country bring our students together as one community, grounded in shared values.

For these reasons, I strongly support House Bill 117 and its intent to reinforce the importance of patriotism in our schools. I believe that instilling these values in our students is not only appropriate but essential to nurturing informed, respectful, and engaged citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Jeffery R. Ritz
Superintendent
Willard City Schools