

Proponent Testimony for H.R. C. No. 22
Education Committee
Monday, September 29, 2025
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Chair Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Education Committee, it is a privilege to provide proponent testimony for H.R.C. No. 22. I want to begin by expressing my gratitude for this resolution and for the history of this country, which I stand here as both a product of and a participant in.

The upcoming 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence is not only a milestone in our national story but also an invitation to reexamine the founding of our nation, what ideals guided it, what contradictions marked it, and how those truths have shaped the America we live in today. As an educator, I welcome the chance to ensure that students engage with this document not only as words on a page but as a living piece of history that demands context, reflection, and honest conversation.

The initial testimony from the representatives called attention to challenging language in the Declaration, words like “**despotism.**” Merriam-Webster defines despotism as “oppressive absolute power and authority exerted by government.” The inclusion of such a word shows the founders’ desire to cast off monarchy and demand representation. But if students only read the word without context, they miss the deeper truth: the Declaration was inspired by philosophers and revolutionaries who were pushing for freedom, while simultaneously excluding many from its promise.

That contradiction becomes clearer when we look at Thomas Jefferson’s original draft. In one of its most striking passages, he charged the King of England with having:

“waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce.”

Those words never made it into the final Declaration. They were struck, in part because of the economic and political interests tied to slavery. Yet they reveal something essential: even at the founding, the wrongs of slavery were recognized in writing by one of the document’s authors, even as he himself held people in bondage. I encourage all of America to read it in its entirety.

This is the heart of the matter. As we approach 250 years of American independence, and as this resolution urges our children to read the Declaration, what story of America will we teach them? A story polished to flatter us? Or the story in its fullness, the good, the bad, and the ugly, so that students may wrestle with our founding ideals and contradictions, and build something stronger for the generations who follow? They deserve to know the whole truth and dissect the wrongdoings with a lens that is Pro-American because of the greatness we possess as a country, all of us. It is our shared history.

As someone who loves this country deeply, I ask this question in good faith: will we have the courage to tell the whole story? I hold these truths to be self-evident. Which do you? Thank you and I welcome any questions.