

Good afternoon, Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jim O'Connor. I am the President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies and a teacher at Princeton High School, located near Cincinnati. I teach AP Human Geography, Ohio Mock Trial, American Government and Introduction to Geography. I have been fortunate to work for over 25 years at one of the most diverse high schools in the state. I've also been fortunate to have served my state and country as a member of the Ohio Air National Guard from 1986-2006.

I have learned a great deal from students of different backgrounds. Teaching students from various races, ethnicities and income levels have made me a better teacher and, indeed, a better person. Students from Princeton High School are well equipped to deal with the complexity of a changing world, country and state because they live and experience diversity on a daily basis.

The state of Ohio defines that one of the major goals of a social studies education is to develop civic competence. From the [Source: Ohio Social Studies Standards \(Page 3\)](#), *"Civic competence rests on a commitment to democratic values, and requires the ability to use knowledge about one's community, nation, and world; apply inquiry processes; and employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem solving."*

Applying inquiry processes has been at the heart of instructing prospective teachers how to teach social studies for decades. My training took place about thirty years ago. My fellow college classmates and I were taught how to use the Decision-Making Tree Model. Over the years, the Decision-Making Tree gave way to the pedagogical strategies of the Essential Question. And then The Guided Question. Today, the Inquire Design Model (IDM) is very much a part of the training of social studies educators. The common theme throughout these models is teaching students critical-thinking skills while examining issues from multiple-perspectives. My college education and training on how to teach issues and ethical decision-making was not partisan or indoctrination. I have carried that non-partisan mantra with me to this day.

We live in a complex world with complex issues. Making the complex understandable is what social studies teachers do best.. HB 322 takes direct aim at the development of critical thinking skills and the inquiry process by eliminating any issue deemed "divisive." **HB 322 is anti-democratic and anti-intellectual.**

According to the Ohio Department of Education standards, the state of Ohio WANTS students to get involved in local issues and civic affairs. That's a good thing, right?

The following Topic is from the American Government high school standards.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND SKILLS [ODE Amer Gov't standards, pg 36](#) *Democratic government is enhanced when individuals exercise the skills to effectively participate in civic affairs.*

However, HB 322 offers a complete contradiction to the ODE American Government standards approved by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor.

HB 322 would greatly limit such student opportunities. Section 3313.6027 part (B) prohibits students from

1. “work(ing) for, affiliation with, or service learning in association with any organization engaged in lobbying for legislation at the local, state, or federal level or in social or public policy advocacy;
2. Lobbying for legislation at the local, state, or federal level; or
3. Any practicum, action project, or similar activity that involves social or public policy advocacy.”

If passed, HB 322 would shut down Government and Civics participatory projects in Ohio classrooms. Participatory projects have long been a staple of social studies teachers. Often the best and richest learning for students comes from working on local issues, campaigns, service learning projects or attending a city council meeting. By law and practice, teachers do not pick sides on issues or campaigns. What teachers do is make these opportunities available to students and explain what students need to be aware of so that they can do their own inquiry and analysis.

The following is a list of the various student learning opportunities compromised by HB 322:

National Honor Society service learning requirements, service learning hours used by many districts as a graduation requirement, field studies to non-profit organizations, guest speakers approved by the teacher/principal/district and the aforementioned “Democracy in Action” type of activities in which students actively get involved in a local, state or national issue.

The students, families and communities of the state of Ohio deserve the very best education we can provide them. Indeed, the future of Ohio rests largely on the effectiveness of the education of Ohio's youth. We need them to be successful! We must do better than passing bills written by out-of-state think tanks. We must do much better than passing bills that are

anti-democratic and anti-intellectual.

Why don't we have a summit and work together to address the real and perceived problems mentioned in HB 322. Members of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies would welcome such a meeting. The non-partisan OCSS, founded in 1956, is one of the largest and most respected social studies organizations in the country. We are experts in our field and love sharing that expertise with others.

How about a summit with the mentioned parties and other stakeholders? Wouldn't it be exciting to show our students, families and communities that democracy DOES work?

That people with differences of opinion and perspective can discuss matters in a civil way and offer compromises to reach a solution which benefits the common good.

Thank you,

Jim O'Connor

OCSS President, 2021-22