

Ohio HB 322 Opponent Testimony
September 2021
Dr. Sarah Stitzlein

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for reading my testimony today. I have been researching citizenship education at the university level and preparing teachers who teach citizenship to children for 16 years. While I am not speaking on behalf of the University of Cincinnati today, I am speaking as a national expert in citizenship education. In 2020, I was commissioned by UNESCO to write about the future of citizenship education and in 2021 I was commissioned by the National Academy of Education to write a major report on how to improve civic reasoning and discourse through citizenship education.

I urge you to vote no on HB 322, which forbids the use of action civics or involving students in projects that advocate for public policies. Actively engaging students in the practices of citizenship while still young has been proven to be one of the most effective ways to instill habits of citizenship that carry well into adulthood. A primary duty of a good citizen is being knowledgeable about current events and proposed policies related to changes or struggles in our society. Citizens don't just suddenly know how to engage in these sorts of endeavors the moment they turn eighteen or graduate. Quality citizenship education helps students understand how civic and political deliberations occur over social problems and how policies are formed. Projects that require students to become more informed about issues that are of importance to them or their community and to get involved in the process of working to address those issues through improved policy is a proven way to make learning about civics relevant to the lives of students and to establish dispositions toward taking action in the future (see excellent studies conducted and collated by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and National Council for the Social Studies).

Discussing current events, including those that are contentious, is a helpful way to make civics course more than just dull memorization of facts. These discussions help civic matters come alive for students, revealing how and why political decisions and public policies relate to their lives. Moreover, research shows that engaging students effectively in the political process through advocacy work can build their sense of political agency, showing them that they can have a meaningful impact on their communities. This helps to work against feelings of apathy and cynicism that can spread amongst youth who feel that their voices are not heard or valued in the public sphere.

Restricting action civics and/or advocacy work runs counter to clear research on effective citizenship education. This bill jeopardizes not just the quality of education that we can provide in Ohio schools, but the quality of citizens that we will have in our state for years to come. I urge you to vote **no** on HB 322.

Respectfully,
Dr. Sarah Stitzlein
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