

**Proponent Testimony on H. B. No. 103,
“Establish Ohio Social Studies Standards Task Force”
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am Adam Kissel, Visiting Fellow for Higher Education Reform at a think tank in D.C., speaking for myself, in favor of H. B. No. 103. Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts.

I serve on the Civics and Civic Engagement Advisory Council for the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission. I have been Director of Civic and Higher Education Programs at The Philanthropy Roundtable, a director of the Jack Miller Center at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Higher Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education. I also am Chairman of the West Virginia Professional Charter School Board. I was on the steering committee and the executive committee for the project that developed the *American Birthright* model social studies standards.

Mr. Chair, I have spent some time with Ohio’s Social Studies Learning Standards from 2018 and with Ohio’s 2019 Model Curriculum for Social Studies K-12. Overall, I would say that these documents establish a reasonably good minimum foundation for American history and civics. But compared with *American Birthright*, the standards and model curriculum are relatively thin.

I support H. B. No. 103 because it would entail revising the model curriculum at a higher level of quality, using standards based on a high-quality, politically-neutral source.

This is a particularly opportune time to revise the standards and model curriculum. The nationwide scores of eighth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics and in history, which just came out, are the lowest they have *ever* been, which covers 25 years of testing. Only 13% of students scored as proficient in history, and only 22% scored as proficient in civics.

I also have spent some time with Ohio’s 2019-2024 Strategic Plan for Education. This document makes me concerned that the Ohio Department of Education and State Board appear to be downplaying core knowledge in favor of other values such as “equity.” In civics, for example, this concern plays out in an emphasis on civic *engagement* at the expense of civic *knowledge* and *understanding*.

I believe Ohio will get a better result by creating the task force proposed in H. B. 103.

H. B. No. 103 would create a social studies standards task force that will create standards based on *American Birthright*. I expect that this task force will develop content-rich standards that:

- (1) are honest about American history and government for the next generation of Americans;
- (2) produce graduates who know that they are Americans rather than merely “citizens of the world,” while understanding the rest of the world;
- (3) develop graduates with a strong level of economic literacy; and
- (4) develop the intellectual skills needed for proficiency in the social sciences.

The nation’s low NAEP scores call us to do something. H. B. No. 103 is not just something; it’s the main thing. Even so, it is necessary but not sufficient. For implementation, professional development of teachers will be critical.

Fortunately, here in Ohio, you have the truly excellent Ashbrook Center at Ashland University. To prepare teachers in civics and in history, Ashbrook has partnered with the Bill of Rights Institute and the Jack Miller Center for Teaching America’s Founding Principles and History. These three organizations are providing high-quality civics instruction for K-12 teachers across the country. In Florida, teachers get a salary bump if they complete any educational program run by this partnership. I commend to you the Florida model for getting teachers better informed and excited about teaching social studies.

I believe we are here today not just because Ohio revises its social studies standards every so often. We are here with this bill because it is time to raise the bar for the children of Ohio and for the sake of our constitutional republic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.