

Testimony in Opposition to HB 103
(William Hilt)

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

HB 103 seeks to upend how students learn the social studies in the digital age. In my thirty years as a social studies teacher and as current President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies, I've seen huge and positive changes in how we teach. Today our students learn how to evaluate, consider, analyze, collaborate, compare, and think critically. These are the skills that employers are seeking today.

The American Birthright standards would have us abandon teaching social studies skills and concepts, and instead, as the standards themselves put it, stock student minds with dates, persons, and places. Facts are vitally important – and believe me, students in my classes will learn many of them. But telling students what to think about those facts is not a best practice. Teachers are not indoctrinating students in any sort of ideology. Rather, we teach them the tools they can use to analyze and evaluate our history, economy, and government.

Since facts are the very foundation of social studies, it's troubling that the new standards would ban the teaching of media literacy. In an age where students have access to an abundance of information and misinformation, failing to teach students how to identify authoritative sources will leave them unprepared to fulfill their most important job, that of citizen. It will leave them open to manipulation and indoctrination by those who don't have our republic's best interests at heart.

The proposed standards discourage students from collaborating on social studies projects. They propose omitting working cooperatively precisely at a time when we're hearing from employers that they want to hire people skilled at collaborating in diverse groups.

Civic engagement may be the most important concept I learned as a student. I remember as a boy scout, being required to attend a local city council meeting. That was very impactful; however, it seems *American Birthright* would forbid such engagement under a label like "action civics" or "civic engagement." Many students are engaged with our society, our economy, our culture. Is this something we want to discourage?

The new standards also forbid teaching current events. I could be unable to talk to my students about this hearing today and use it as an example of how government works. Without a connection to current events, social studies students are stranded in the past and unable to learn from the nation's shared experience.

One very concerning feature of the proposed standards is a ban on “social-emotional learning.” According to ODE’s SEL standards, “People need to know how to successfully interact with each other, establish and maintain positive relationships, feel and show empathy, understand and manage their emotions and set and achieve positive goals. Social-emotional learning improves children’s mental health and helps them avoid risky decisions, make healthy choices and stay drug free.” As a teacher of intermediate students, I see the important connections that students make between social studies and SEL every day.

American Birthright states, “Every student should be educated to be another Harry Truman—a high school graduate, who without ever graduating from college, has a solid grasp of history...” While it may sound comforting to some, I teach digital natives, many of whom have had electronic devices in their hands since before they could walk. They require engagement and they are very capable of becoming lifelong learners who learn the facts AND the skills. How will our youth see through all the mis and disinformation without good media literacy skills? How would one learn empathy and compassion armed only with dates, persons, and places?

I urge you to use the skills you yourself have learned in your social studies education to assess HB 103 for yourself and seriously consider whether or not you want the next generation— those who are growing up in the Twenty-first Century, a time when the world is accelerating faster than ever, AI is exploding, and we’re looking to Mars—to be armed with a 1901 high school education. We must not equip Ohio students with an antiquated education in today’s accelerated world.