

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Michael Kopish. I have been a social studies educator for over 25 years. Some of that time was spent as a high school teacher and some as a university professor of teacher education who prepares future social studies teachers and supports current ones.

In my various roles as an educator, a parent of school-age children, and a citizen of Ohio, I am vehemently opposed to HB 103.

As an educator, American Birthright is highly problematic. On page 20, it states that “learning standards consist of simple statements of what factual content to teach, not of how to teach. American Birthright includes no concepts or skills.” On page 26, it states, “we judge that a great many pedagogies actively inhibit student learning including action civics, so-called “anti-racism,” civic engagement, critical race theory, current events learning, inquiry-based learning, media literacy, project-based learning, social-emotional learning.”

Civic education is complex yet essential for developing an informed and engaged citizenry. Civic education involves the process of acquiring (1) knowledge about American polity, politics, and government, and about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; (2) skills in understanding political communication and civic participation; and (3) the dispositions or motivations necessary to be engaged, not merely passive participants. With blanket statements, American Birthright disregards and ignores decades of research on civic learning. In fact, several of the pedagogies listed as inhibiting student learning are actually proven practices of civic education.

As a parent of elementary-age children, social studies is marginalized and reduced to minutes every other week. To the credit of their teachers, they engage students through project-based and inquiry-based learning in social studies. Recently my daughter had to develop a good or service to learn the fundamentals of economics and entrepreneurship. Before that, she engaged in inquiry to learn about Susan B. Anthony and wrote a biography. My son learned about our community through civic engagement in the school garden.

American Birthright argues against this type of learning for rote memorization; for students to explain - describe - identify all low-order thinking. The vision of pedagogy promoted by American Birthright is shared on page 29, where they state, “Elementary students can practice handwriting by copying the Declaration of Independence—and they can also use the Declaration of Independence to practice their ability to read cursive.”

As a citizen of Ohio, I am mortified that our legislature is proposing social studies standards developed by right-wing policy advocacy groups such as the Clairemont Institute, Family Research Council, Discovery Institute, and individuals such as Parental Rights Foundation

president William Estrada, Moms for Liberty co-founder Tiffany Justice, and the Manhattan Institute's Christopher Rufo. American Birthright explicitly promotes white nationalist and Christian nationalist ideologies. On page 25, they state, "Our criteria for including particular items generally have been whether they help students to learn the themes and topics we listed above in Scope and Sequence."

What is included? American Birthright deliberately disregards contributions, stories, narratives, and histories of diverse people and communities in our pluralist democracy and limits global history through a lens of Western civilization. On pages 22-24, American Birthright explicitly promotes Christianity through its characterization of history, selection of readings, its descriptions of the content, and acknowledgment that it is designed to work in tandem with Biblical Literacy courses.

In Ohio, we have robust social studies standards adopted in 2019, developed by Ohioans for Ohioans. The Ohio social studies standards are representative of a democratic process that involves teachers, educators, and other stakeholders in the design and cycles of input from the community to reach a consensus. In one heavy-handed stroke, this legislation seeks to dismantle democratic education for thousands of Ohioans, all by August 15.

As an educator, a father, and a citizen of Ohio, I ask you to consider my testimony and NO vote on this grossly ideological and wrong bill for social studies education. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.