



May 16, 2023

House Primary and Secondary Committee

HB 103 opponent Testimony

Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and committee members, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents teachers in traditional and charter schools, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, social workers, library employees, and other public employees across Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to HB 103.

We oppose HB 103 for three reasons. First, we disagree that there is any need at this time for the new learning standards for social studies in Ohio. If policy makers do see a need for this, we strongly believe that those standards should be developed through the Department of Education (ODE), rather than through a partisan task force of political appointees.

Ohio's current social studies learning standards were adopted in 2018. According to the ODE, the process "began with an ODE survey seeking public and educator feedback between November 2016 and January 2017. An advisory committee of representatives from statewide education associations and social studies education groups reviewed the public comments and advised the Department on which standards to update. Working groups of educators with social studies expertise reviewed the recommendations and made revisions in a draft of the standards. The Department posted the draft revised standards for public review in summer 2017. The working groups reviewed those comments and incorporated suggestions in the draft standards. The State Board of Education adopted the revised standards in February 2018."

These best practices, including parent and educator input, are essential for drafting standards that are age-appropriate, academically rigorous, and unbiased by partisan political talking points.

Our second point of disagreement is the requirement for the task force to create standards based on *American Birthright: The Civics Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*. While these standards certainly include many important topics – most, or all, of which are already included in current standards – there is also a strong bias in how topics are framed and discussed. For example, the stated intent of this document is to promote social studies standards that eliminate anything seen as "multiculturalism" or "antiracism." This self-admitted bias limits *American Birthright's* usefulness as a source for statewide standards; more importantly it completely disqualifies *American Birthright* as something that could be used as the sole basis for new standards.

*American Birthright* is promoted by the Civics Alliance of the National Association of Scholars, described by objective sources as a politically right-wing advocacy organization. Creating social

studies standards based solely on anything from the Civics Alliance would be codifying a partisan political bias into our schools. The “coalition” members of the Civics Alliance include a number of Republican politicians, conservative think tanks, and academics with a uniformly conservative view of America’s history and institutions. This is why the American Historical Association, the largest professional organization serving historians in all fields and all professions, has denounced American Birthright Standards. Historians from across the country have worked to educate all Americans that the study of history cannot be grounded only in rote memorization or one particular view.

Adopting standards based on American Birthright will have real, tangible costs to Ohio school districts and students. First, curriculum based on these standards would conflict with the textbooks used by well over 80% of Ohio’s public and private secondary schools, creating a need for new textbooks and other materials. Second, these standards will outright ban the AP American Government course in Ohio costing family’s hundreds of thousands of dollars in saved tuition fees every year.

Finally, if the legislature insists on creating a task force for new social studies standards, we urge you to appoint task force members that are representative of Ohio’s diversity. The current bill language would create a task force of nine Republican appointees and zero Democratic appointees, for a state where Democrats get roughly 45% of the vote in statewide elections. A task force with the composition would be an unprecedented insult to all Ohioans who don’t belong to the majority party.

Please reject this legislation and allow ODE to revisit social studies standards using their standard process. If this legislation can not be stopped, we urge you to amend it to allow for a broader set of materials to base the new standards on and a more representative and diverse task force.