

House Bill 103 Opposition Testimony
Jonah Thomas Pichette
Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

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

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to submit written testimony in *opposition* to House Bill 103. My name is Jonah Thomas Pichette, and I am submitting this written testimony rather than speaking in front of the committee as I am a high school world history, and psychology educator who would not be able to be present in time to give my testimony in person. I submit this testimony as an individual, not representative of any place of employment, or group/organization of which I am affiliated.

This bill will have detrimental effects on the state of social studies education in the immediate, and the future for our students in Ohio. More specifically, House Bill 103 appears to be a solution, looking for a problem, by appointing a politically charged task force to “develop statewide academic standards”¹. A redundancy, as the Ohio Department of Education already has mechanisms in place to serve the purpose of this bill that involve a diverse group of stakeholders.²

The American Birthright Standards, set to be adopted through the passage of the Bill, show an extremely pronounced bias that undercut the development of critical thinking skills necessary for success in social studies education, and within the world. Changes this bill would bring forth fail to equip students with the tools to identify and evaluate the accuracy of information they encounter in the media and throughout history, focusing more on content that is untested and historically questionable in the way it is presented through the standards than on skills itself. This is truly terrifying in an era where students and citizens, including myself, across the State are exposed to a vast array of both true and untrue information through social media and other platforms.

The extremely pronounced bias presented within the American Birthright Standards limits students’ ability to think critically, and to interpret historical events that contribute to a complete understanding of our proud nation and Europe’s past. By presenting the distorted narrative that America and Europe are unchanged, and failing to identify key events that have shaped America and the world into the place we can be proud of today, and these proposed standards are presenting a false depiction of history. Thus, denying students an opportunity to engage with the complexities, contradictions and diverse perspectives that shape our shared historical legacy.

¹ The Ohio House of Representatives, “HB 103 Bill Analysis”, The Ohio House of Representatives – 135th General Assembly, May 2, 2023, https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/cm_pub_api/api/unwrap/general_assembly_135/chamber/135th_ga/ready_for_publication/unpublished/bills/house/hb103/00/an_135_0236/ANHB0103IN-135.pdf

² Ohio Department of Education, “Ohio Learning Standards Review Process,” Ohio Department of Education, January 2020, <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Standard-Revision-Overview/StandardsRevisionProcess.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

It is imperative that our social studies curriculum embraces a balanced and objective view of history, that encourages students to explore multiple viewpoints, analyze primary sources, and engage in thoughtful discussion. It is additionally imperative to understand the current mechanisms to write the standards and model curriculum for the State of Ohio through the Ohio Department of Education allow for these objectives to be included.

In addition, I have grave concerns that the authors and co-sponsors of this bill have not entirely considered the true local costs of this legislation. This bill would lead to an entire revamping of the K-12 social studies curriculum. What that translates into is hundreds of hours of work for the State of Ohio Social Studies teachers, and curriculum directors, who will need to align all their units, lessons, materials, and assessments. In addition, this will require the purchase of new textbooks, to ensure they align with the new standards.

Ohio students, teachers, districts, and communities deserve better than House Bill 103. Vote no on House Bill 103.

Thank you for your consideration and care to my opinion on the matter. I would welcome questions from any member of the committee at any time.

Sincerely,
Jonah Thomas Pichette
Opposed to House Bill 103