

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Arianna Kelawala
Organization: OPAWL
Testifying as Proponent

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

Thank you so much for calling this hearing today as we take another step toward our goal of having an updated social studies curriculum that reflects the backgrounds and histories of *all* Ohioans. My name is Arianna Kelawala and I'm a student at The Ohio State University and I'm the campaign organizer for the Educating for Ohio's Future Campaign at OPAWL-Building AAPI Feminist Leadership. OPAWL is a statewide membership organization that represents AAPI people from across the state with over 300 members.

Over a year ago, OPAWL members came together to envision a campaign for legislation that changed the way the history of our communities is taught in Ohio classrooms. We wanted to ensure learners from many communities who are not currently fully represented in our K-12 curricula could see their stories in the classroom. We knew this common-sense and forward-thinking endeavor can be achieved by building a coalition of stakeholders from all over the state that mirrors those who will be most impacted: educators, students, parents and community members.

In short, the very people who would be responsible for implementing HB171 are some of its strongest supporters: educators, parents, students, and community organizations.

Now I could spend my whole time telling you about the impressive data that backs this bill and others like it. I could tell you about the ways that we have clear research that indicates that students of color in particular engage more in their classrooms and show up to school to learn when their curriculum reflects parts of their story. In a post-COVID education world of chronic absenteeism, this is a solution. I can tell you all about the studies that AAPI groups across the country did in the wake of increased racism towards the Asian community and how when asking victims what the solution to this problem is, the number one answer they gave is education. But this issue isn't about just research and data, it's deeply personal, especially to me.

My parents immigrated to the United States from India in 1999 with very little. Like so many others, they came to the United States hoping for better opportunities for their future family. When I was 10 years old, my parents were naturalized and became American citizens. My family now lives in Gahanna with a home and one kid in college, me, and another in high school with so many possibilities for both of us. My family's story echoes the stories of so many others, but when I was in school, I never learned about the stories of families like mine. I was lucky enough to go to Gahanna Jefferson Public Schools, a great school district with fantastic educators, but even with such a great education, I often felt misunderstood by my peers. At school, there weren't a lot of other students that looked like me and I often got asked about

where I was from. When I would respond that I'm Indian, students often assumed I was Native American, because materials referred to Native Americans as "Indians" and India was rarely mentioned in our texts. It definitely led to confusion about my own identity and put the burden on me to explain my identity to other students as I was still trying to figure it out myself. I believe that if my classroom had taught about India or Indian culture, I would have had a reference point to point to when students in my class asked about my identity, which would have really changed how I perceived myself and how others perceived me. I'm a part of this campaign because I believe that students should not bear the burden of trying to explain their identity and introduce a country or culture to their fellow students for the first time.

Since its inception in 2021, the 'Educating for Ohio's Future' coalition has grown to include over 50 organizations spanning ethnic and racial communities, teacher's unions and organizations, parents groups and student groups. In June we brought almost 200 constituents to the statehouse for our advocacy day and held over 50 meetings with members of the Ohio house and senate where we shared our stories of why HB 171 is important to us. We have sent committee members over 3200 letters to the Committee calling for a proponent testimony hearing.

This is what has brought us to today.

Today, Chair Bird asked to hear from three supporters of our bill. Our speakers will outline how our bill is LOW LIFT HIGH IMPACT legislation. It leverages the existing process of model curriculum revision and development by subject matter experts currently overseen by the Department of Education and Workforce. It is not an added burden to Social Studies educators, many of whom have already been doing this work on their own. In fact, we'll hear from our friends at the Ohio Council for the Social Studies today on why they support HB 171. Our proposal will simply equip all Social studies teachers with easy access to quality curricula resources based upon best practices in the field. We know HB 171 will make a difference for students statewide as well as for future learners.

HB 171 seeks to update Ohio's Social Studies and American history model curriculum for K-12 public schools to reflect the backgrounds and histories of a range of communities that already call Ohio home. This proposal has the support of a broad range of organizations and communities including teachers unions and organizations, parents, students and community organizations.

We are grateful to the committee for giving us an opportunity for a proponent testimony hearing. We have been asked to invite only three speakers to share their positions at today's hearing. Nearly 3,200 Ohioans have written to Committee members in recent months to voice their support for HB 171. As of today, we have also submitted almost 70 written testimonies from Ohioans statewide in support of HB 171 and calling for its passage.

Today we ask the committee to call another proponent testimony hearing in January 2024 so more constituents can share why passing HB 171 matters to them. We hope that after giving

Ohioans the chance to have their voice heard about his proposal, the committee will put it to a vote and pass HB 171 in early 2024.