

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Selina M. Pagan
Organization: Young Latino Network
Testifying as Proponent

December 10th, 2023

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 171 - Updating Ohio's Social Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, and esteemed members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

As the Executive Director of the Young Latino Network and a concerned citizen deeply invested in the education of Ohio's youth, I write to express my full support for HB 171. This pivotal bill seeks to update Ohio's K-12 social studies model curriculum, ensuring that it authentically reflects the rich and varied histories of all Ohioans. Please consider this legislation's profound positive impact on shaping a more comprehensive educational experience for our children.

Allow me to provide further context on the experiences of my cherished nephew Mason and niece Madison. Their father, a proud Cleveland Fire Fighter, is a native son, born and raised in the heart of Cleveland. His lineage traces back to African American ancestors who endured the trials of slavery in this country's tumultuous past. Their mother, my sister, who runs our family's small business in the heart of Cleveland, was raised in Ohio by our parents, who migrated from the island of Puerto Rico.

Madison and Mason embody the blend of these diverse cultural heritages, a microcosm of the rich tapestry that defines many African American and Puerto Rican families across Ohio. Their family's history encapsulates struggles, triumphs, and contributions woven into the fabric of our state's narrative. It's a story of resilience, hard work, and the pursuit of the American dream.

Their experiences mirror those of countless families in Ohio, whose narratives are often underrepresented or omitted entirely from our social studies model curriculum. The omission of such vital histories deprives our children of the opportunity to connect with and appreciate the diverse contributions that have shaped Ohio into the thriving state it is today.

It is imperative that our educational framework acknowledges and celebrates these diverse narratives. By updating the social studies model curriculum to reflect the multifaceted histories of families like Madison's and Mason's, we embrace the opportunity to foster understanding, respect, and inclusivity among our students. Every Ohio child deserves the chance to see themselves reflected in the stories told within their classrooms.

The histories and contributions of African American, Puerto Rican, and other marginalized communities are integral to the rich tapestry of Ohio's past and present. By supporting HB 171, we can ensure that the educational framework respects and acknowledges the contributions of all Ohioans, creating an inclusive environment where every child feels valued and empowered by their heritage.

The Educating for Ohio's Future Campaign, spearheaded by the collaborative efforts of Representative Mary Lightbody and dedicated advocates, seeks to rectify these existing gaps by updating the social studies model curriculum. HB 171 endeavors to encompass the migration histories, societal contributions, and experiences of various communities residing in Ohio. These communities include, but are not limited to, African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Arab, African, North African immigrant, refugee, asylee, Appalachian, Jewish, Latin American, Caribbean, and Native American communities.

The importance of this legislation transcends political divides; it aligns with the fundamental purpose of education – to cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and a comprehensive understanding of our shared history. Research indicates that an inclusive curriculum promotes students' sense of belonging and self-worth. HB 171 presents an opportunity to foster an educational environment where all students feel acknowledged, valued, and empowered to succeed.

Moreover, this bill does not seek to overhaul the existing curriculum but a necessary evolution in education that enriches the curriculum by acknowledging the diverse makeup of Ohio's populace. With endorsements from esteemed educational bodies like the Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and Ohio Council of the Social Studies, it enjoys widespread support from educators who recognize the importance of this update.

Respectfully, I urge the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee to consider the transformative impact of HB 171 on Ohio's educational landscape. This bill represents our collective opportunity to create positive change for the future of Ohio's education system. The time to act is now. By supporting HB 171, you have the chance to pave the way for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and enriching educational experience for all Ohio's children, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Selina Pagan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Selina M. Pagan
Executive Director