

4th House District

Parts of NE Franklin County
Including Gahanna, New Albany,
Westerville, Blacklick, Columbus, and
area townships



135th General Assembly Committees

Agriculture
Energy & Natural Resources
Higher Education
Pensions, Ranking Member
Primary & Secondary Education

Representative Mary Lightbody 4th House District

Testimony to the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 171
June 20, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 171.

The goal of this bill is to include instruction on the contributions of a range of communities in Ohio in the next iteration of the K-12 social studies model curriculum. I will begin my testimony by providing information about the specifics of the bill, and conclude with my perspectives on why this legislation is so very important.

House Bill 171 would work within the existing standards revisions and corresponding curriculum development process, providing options and enriching the guidance used by our education experts to continue developing the best curriculum for Ohio's students. It would require the State Board of Education to begin to update the model curriculum for social studies to include age- and grade- appropriate instruction about the experiences, and societal contributions of a range of communities in Ohio and the United States, including all of the following people:

- (a) African American;
- (b) Asian American and Pacific Islander;
- (c) Arab, African, and North African immigrants and refugees
- (d) Appalachian;
- (e) Jewish;
- (f) Latin American; and
- (g) Native American.

This bill would not mandate or impose anything on local school districts, which already make their own choices on which curricula they use. Rather, this bill will update the model curricula to provide a guidepost for Ohio school districts and educators who seek to educate and engage Ohio's students on the histories of the peoples who already call Ohio home, many of whom immigrated here from countries across the world.

I think that Ohio's social studies model curriculum should enable students to develop a rich understanding of American History and the individuals and groups that make up our nation. Schools are where our children dare to dream of their future. I want all Ohio students to achieve those dreams, and this starts when they receive the highest quality education available.

Preparing Ohio's future workforce to navigate a global economy early on in school equips our students with the tools, understanding, and knowledge they need to solve problems and contribute to society.

Ohio and the United States benefit from those who come to our country in search of freedom and opportunities and have made and will long continue to make tremendous contributions to our lives.

Although my career in education was teaching science and future teachers of science, this bill resonates with me personally. I spent a year during high school as an exchange student in Thailand; I lived that year as a member of the Thinakorn family, attended a Thai high school with my host sister, and became immersed in the culture. And yes, I learned to read, write, and speak Thai: "chan puut pasaa Thai dai".

My undergraduate major at Harvard was Asian Studies, with a focus on China. I studied Chinese for 4 years (wo hui shuo Zhong wen) and did an honors research study on the role of women in their villages. In 2008 I spent a month in Indonesia working with the university faculty and more recently attended the Asian Festival at Franklin Park, a Nepali and Bhutanese event in Westerville, and a Pakistani community dinner in Gahanna.

Consequently, my appreciation of the cultures of the Ohioans who are included in HB 171 could not be deeper. My interest in ensuring that the revised Ohio social studies model curriculum includes information and engaging learning experiences about the languages, cultures, and contributions to Ohio and American history from these diverse people could not be more resolute.

There is a large coalition of people who worked with me to develop this legislation, all of which are in support of this bill, including OPAWL, Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, Hilliard Education Association, OEA Hispanic Caucus, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Ohio, Honesty for Ohio Education, The Freedom BLOC, Young Latino Network, and The Sikh Coalition. Representatives from these groups are eager to share their perspectives on and expertise about this legislation, so I hope we can schedule additional hearings on this proposed legislation soon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.