



Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square

To: Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
From: Chris Long, President Ohio Christian Alliance
Re: Opponent testimony H.B. 239 Reduce end of course assessment

I would like to thank Chairman Jones, Vice Chairman Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee for hearing our testimony today in opposition to H.B. 239 that would eliminate end of course examination in American Government and History.

Let me begin with a brief legislative history for the committee's benefit on legislation that was passed in the 129th General Assembly in 2012 named The Founding of America Documents Curriculum, legislation that strengthened American Government and History curriculum in Ohio schools from grades 8-12. At that time, it was sponsored by State Rep. John Adams and State Senator Larry Obhof.

Our organization has supported strengthening American Government and History standards in Ohio schools for the past twenty years. We first started supporting legislation in 1999 that would accomplish what eventually S.B. 165 did accomplish, assuring that Ohio school children learn the importance of The Declaration of Independence, The Northwest Ordinance, The Constitution of The United States with emphasis on the Bill of Rights, The Ohio Constitution, the Federalist Papers and the Anti-Federalist Papers in the Ohio Classroom in grades 8-12 with an end of course exam.

It took more than ten years to convince enough legislators, members of the State School Board, and an Ohio governor that the time had come to strength American Government and History standards in Ohio schools with an emphasis on the founding documents of our nation. Then in the 129th General Assembly with broad bipartisan support in both the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate, S.B. 165 was passed and signed enthusiastically by Governor Kasich. The State School Board passed an endorsing resolution supporting the effort. The Ohio Historical Association launched an effort to highlight the legislation and the importance of the Founding Documents, as well as Ohio's role in our early founding. Former Secretary of State Jon Husted launched a Founding Fathers Initiative to support the effort, as well.

The reason for the original concern was that Ohio's graduating seniors had low proficiency rates in American Government and American History. Newsweek Magazine in 2011 conducted a poll of 1,000 adults nationwide with 20 basic questions on American civics. They included the results in an article titled, "How Dumb Are We?" Only 62% of those polled passed the test. Included were such basic questions as "What happened at the Constitutional Convention?" (only 35% got that correct), "What is one power of the federal government?" (only 19% could list one power belonging to the federal government), and "What is the supreme law of the land?" (only 30% knew that The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land). It was because of the alarming results that the effort was launched to enact the Founding of America Documents Curriculum for Ohio school students.

That great founding patriot, John Adams, once warned his generation that, "A Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever."

Thomas Jefferson stated, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

George Washington, our first President, demonstrated by his act of stepping down from his elected office, that we truly were a republic, not a monarchy. When King George of England heard this, he stated, "If he steps down, he truly will be the greatest man in the world." George Washington was following those guided restrictions on governmental office laid out in the U.S. Constitution. As our first chief executive, he stated, "The Constitution is the guide which I never will abandon." This is not a time for us to abandon the Constitutional studies in the Ohio classroom; far from it. It's a time when we should be emphasizing our Founding Documents and the freedoms and liberties that they afford every citizen.

The threat of ignorance of governmental studies still exists in the U.S. population. In 2018, the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania issued the findings of their civics knowledge survey of 1,008 U.S. adults. The results were released in time for Constitution Day on September 17th. The survey found that many people do not know how the branches of government work.

- A quarter (27%) incorrectly said the Constitution allows the President to ignore a Supreme Court ruling if the President believes the ruling is wrong.
- A third (33%) of respondents could not name any of the three branches of government

Here in Ohio, however, we see higher proficiency rates in America Government and American History by our high school students over the last handful of years. This is due to the Ohio success story of strengthening American Government and American History standards in grades 8-12. The success of S.B. 165 is something in which all Ohioans can take pride.

For the past eight years, Ohio has been making progress, as general knowledge of our constitutional form of government and our founding documents has increased among our graduates. This is due in large part to the fact that The Founding of American Documents Curriculum requires one full credit hour for the course study, one-half credit for American History and one-half credit for American Government, with an end of course exam for each that guarantees it will be taught in the classroom. Without the examination, teachers will not be compelled to take the time for this course study of our founding documents. It is for this reason that we oppose H.B. 239 which is an attempt to reduce or eliminate the testing requirement.

Thank you, Chairman Jones and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.