

Ohio General Assembly

77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: (614) 644-6014
Rep97@ohiohouse.gov

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Adam Holmes

State Representative, District 97

House Bill 214

Thank you Chairman Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking member Brennan, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education committee for hearing House Bill 214 today.

America's unique strength lies in our shared support of fundamental human values. Some of our most deeply held beliefs include individual freedom, self-determination in pursuit of happiness, and equality under the law. In support of these values, the US and Ohio constitutions specifically protect the freedom of speech so integral to American liberty.

To remain consistent with these fundamental American values, Ohio's K-12 public schools must be forums for open expression, new ideas and diverse opinions and experiences. Unfortunately, Ohio's recent political climate has raised concerns that Ohio's K-12 public school teachers, staff and students may face negative consequences for expressing certain political perspectives or failing to conform to specific ideological viewpoints. More directly, concern is growing that employment, funding, promotion, certifications, and classroom evaluations in Ohio's public schools are increasingly tied to demonstrated support for specific ideologies and political opinions.

This bill is intended to promote freedom from obligatory political action or belief inside our K-12 public schools and classrooms in order to uphold the fundamental American concepts of freedom of speech and self-determination.

This bill will support the following actions:

- Ensuring public school districts shall not require employees, students, or job applicants to support any specific ideologies or political movements.
- Ensuring school districts shall not use support statements for specific ideologies or political movements as evaluation criteria for employees, students, or job applicants.
- Provides specific protection for general discussion of political movements, ideologies, and social action inside the classroom.
- Providing specific protection for free speech rights for public school employees, students and job applicants.
- Directing public access to all public school policy and instructional materials concerning political movements, ideology, or social action.
- Ensuring enforcement of policy occurs at the local level.
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As the Ohio Department of Education states, the purpose of our public schools is to ensure every child is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society. Our K-12 public schools are certainly places of learning, but they are also critical community centers and one of the few places in our current society where Ohio citizens of all backgrounds gather and work cooperatively to create community spirit and shared culture.

A robust commitment to the free exchange of ideas and expression of differing viewpoints is not only critical for a successful learning environment, but also consistent with American values of free speech and individual value.

Support of this bill will help us all ensure our public schools remain protected speech environments where together we can build stronger children, stronger communities, and a stronger Ohio. Thank you Chairman Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking member Brennan, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education committee. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.