



House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Chair, Kristey Williams

Hearing: February 16, 2022

Michael Poppa, Mainstream Coalition, Michael@mainstreamcoalition.org,

Oral In-Person testimony

Position – OPPOSE HB 2662; Establishing the parents' bill of rights and academic transparency act, requiring school districts to establish parent transparency portals to provide information on materials that are used or made available in schools, removing the affirmative defense for schools for the crime of promotion to minors of material that is harmful to minors and prohibiting schools from non-renewing a teacher's contract for refusing to teach against certain beliefs or practices.

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee,

Mainstream Coalition opposes HB 2662.

We agree with the concept that a parent should have rights and access to information regarding their child's education. Further, we agree that a child's education is a crucial element of their development, quality of life, and long-term success. It's nice to actually have something that we can agree on.

Unfortunately, this bill is a corruption of these principles, staged by outside interests and supported by rumor mills and fear mongering. Parents already have access to information regarding their child's education and to the teachers, staff, and administrators who support them through their school day. There are regularly scheduled parent teacher conferences and materials sent home or available online. There are public forums and opportunities for engagement like PTA. There are emails and calls between teachers and parents. And there are already opportunities for parents to remove their child from activities or optional questionnaires and surveys. Parents don't lack access or control. External actors trying to influence public education lack access and control. And that's who this bill is actually for.

Mainstream Coalition was founded in 1993 by a bipartisan, multi-faith coalition of community leaders on the inalienable belief of religious freedom and equal representation in our government. Again, we agree with the principle of HB 2662 that public schools should not have a role in the "religious training of the child" - schools should not be teaching any religion or held to any one set of religious values in the classroom. And again, we already have protections against that in our state's bill of rights: "The right to worship God according to the dictates of

Founded in 1993, the Mainstream Coalition is a nonpartisan nonprofit that advocates for common sense public policy in Kansas. Our members do more than vote.

conscience shall never be infringed; nor shall any person be compelled to attend or support any form of worship; nor shall any control of or interference with the rights of conscience be permitted, nor any preference be given by law to any religious establishment or mode of worship.”

As yet another example of this bill trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist, our schools are already held to the ideas of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance and is enforced through the Office for Civil Rights in Ed. This bill is not interested in upholding the hard-won victories of the Civil Rights Act. Instead, it would distort our history and revert our values back to an era when we valued one perspective over all others - that of the white, straight, Christian, higher income family.

HB2662 and SB496 are nearly identical regarding the establishment of this unnecessary parent bill of rights. But HB 2662 goes even farther in establishing a “parent transparency portal” and creating undue burden on already overburdened teachers. You would be forcing teachers to post their original work in the form of their curriculum, activities, and materials and open them to any member of the public who wanted to challenge their decisions. Has anyone from this committee asked teachers what this would mean for workload, their morale, or their ability to teach without fear of retribution? News and opinion pieces circulate regularly about teachers feeling overwhelmed and ready to leave - what would this bill do to teachers who are already feeling under attack?

We support transparency, and we believe that this already exists in our schools. What this bill proposes goes beyond, to borrow language from this bill, what “the average person applying contemporary community standards would find” to be ‘transparent.’

The recent wave of book banning and literal book burning is a tragedy to our first amendment rights. Students seeking to understand the world - and specifically a world where they can better see themselves represented through depictions of black and brown, gay or transgender individuals - should be encouraged to read, not be forbidden access to books just because they contain content that you are uncomfortable with. Too often banning books for “sexual content” is just code for eliminating representations of LGBTQ characters from our library shelves. Again, this bill proposes to accommodate the vocal minority who feel threatened by anything outside of their narrow world-view, and it sets up our children to fail in the reality that lies outside of their parent's bubble.

Parents already have rights in Kansas to guide and support their child's education. They shouldn't have the right to threaten teachers, ban materials or books that present a viewpoint outside of their own, or undermine the hard work and dedication of those individuals who have dedicated their lives to teaching young children. This legislature has repeatedly chosen to listen to a narrow sampling of parents who are angry with their schools and fearful of what they believe to be a threat to how they want the world to operate. You have not listened nearly

enough to parents and teachers who love our schools, want to see a more diverse and welcoming approach to education, and are hopeful for the future our students will create.

We urge you to oppose passage of HB 2662.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Poppa', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Poppa
Executive Director of the Mainstream Coalition