

Written Testimony on House Bill 2039 Senate Education Committee
Presented by Nathan McAlister, Teacher March 22, 2021

Good afternoon Chairwoman Baumgardner and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Nathan McAlister, a high school teacher in Topeka, Kansas, and I am testifying in support of civics education, but not this bill.

The intentions of this bill are noble, but unnecessary. I write this testimony as an educator who has dedicated much of my career to the teaching of the history and government of this country and this state. I write this testimony as an educator who currently sponsors my high school Civic Engagement Club. And I write this testimony as a member of the national iCivics Educator Network. I have not written this testimony in haste or without considerable reflection. I am opposed to this bill not because of its intent, but because of its redundancy.

The intention of this bill is to increase the civic knowledge of the students of Kansas, but this is already happening. The state of Kansas, through the leadership of Randy Watson at the Kansas Department of Education [KSDE] has created programs and standards to actively engage every student in civics education. This has been largely accomplished through the Civic Advocacy Network [CAN] and the innovative History Government and Social Studies [HGSS] standards.

Through the CAN network schools actively engage their students and participate in governmental processes within their school, community, and at the state level. My school was honored to be recognized as a leader in the area of civic engagement last year as a CAN network awardee. In the classroom, Kansas teachers have been following Dr. Watson's lead creating and implementing meaningful and engaging civic-based activities for our students. Additionally, KSDE has created and held a Civic Engagement Conference. This unique conference is organized by adults, but a majority of the presenters and conferees are Kansas students. These students' network with one another on civic-based activities, present past civics projects they have implemented, and hear from incredible keynote speakers, like Mary Beth Tinker. Through the CAN network Kansas has set the standard in civic engagement education.

In the classroom, Kansas teachers are creating innovative activities for our students, guided by our nationally recognized HGSS standards. Our teachers are asked to present, around the nation, because of the innovative and engaging standards we have created. Benjamin Franklin famously said, "**Tell me** and I forget, **teach me** and I may remember, **involve me** and I **learn**." Kansas students with guidance from their teachers have created voter registration drives in their communities, Kansas students have written and passed legislation, Kansas students have worked with citizens of all political stripes to make meaningful change in their communities. In so doing, Kansas students better understand the governmental process, not because they were completing a worksheet or a multiple-choice test, but because they are "involved."

And this is the point, the “involvement” in education, as our HGSS standards have created, are a better bang for your buck. Having students actively engaged in the civic process, having students actively engaged in their government process, and having students presenting and networking with other students throughout the state, this is how we create an active and engaged citizenry. This bill seeks to increase the civics knowledge of Kansas students. This is already happening. Let Dr. Watson and teachers continue to innovate, and lead and Kansas students will lead the nation. the reasons outlined above that I ask you all to vote against House Bill 2039.