



Senate Committee on Education

Chair, Molly Baumgardner

Hearing: February 16, 2022

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

Oral In-Person testimony

Position – OPPOSE SB 496; Establishing the parents' bill of rights for parents of students attending elementary or secondary school in this state.

Chair Baumgardner, and Members of the Committee,

Mainstream Coalition opposes SB 496, establishing the parents' bill of rights for parents of students attending elementary or secondary school in this state

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. Parents don't lack access. External actors trying to influence public education lack access. And that's who this "bill of rights" 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 SB 496 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 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."

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.

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.

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 SB 496.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Poppa', with a stylized, cursive script.

Michael Poppa
Executive Director of the Mainstream Coalition