



## House Bill 1804

# Testimony to the Texas House Education Committee

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### I. Testimony

Good evening, members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to address you concerning these changes to curriculum standards. We support HB 1804 because it will improve the quality of instructional materials in our public schools, especially because these instructional materials will:

1. present positive aspects of the United States and its heritage,
2. approach significant political or social movements in a fair and balanced manner, and
3. include information needed to develop mutual respect and understanding.

These goals are aligned with the constitutional goal of public education, which is to achieve a general diffusion of knowledge to preserve the liberties and rights of the people. To preserve these, our children must have an education that prepares them for self-governance. Such an education must include concepts that build mutual affection and courage, which we draw from knowledge of:

1. past good deeds accomplished by We the People, including the American Revolution, victory in world wars and the Cold War; and the Civil Rights movement;
2. the rarity and goodness of stable popular self-government, and how the United States is the first and longest-lasting republic based on a written constitution; and
3. facts which establish both universal human rights and broad citizenship, such as principles espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Without an understanding of these concepts and our shared history, our society will surely become more fragmented, tribal, and uncivil.

As we marvel at the achievements of our political ancestors, though, we must temper this admiration by acknowledging their failures. By learning from their setbacks and failures, we will build moderation, mutual forbearance, and civility.

To preserve popular self-government, we must raise our children with the knowledge of an affectionate and free citizenry. Equipped with this knowledge, Texas citizens may proceed together with courage and moderation, in company with his or her fellow citizens of all races, colors, and creeds, as they preserve and exercise their right of self-government.

Thank you.

## II. Our Texas Constitution: The Foundation of Public Education

A general diffusion of *knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people*, [emphasis added] it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools. ([Texas Constitution, Article VII, Section 1](#))

Under the Texas Constitution, the purpose of our “public free schools” is to diffuse generally that “knowledge” necessary to the “preservation of the liberties and rights of the people.” This “people,” as explained in the Texas Constitution, is a community of free people who, while “humbly invoking the blessings of Almighty God,” and duly subject to the Constitution and perpetual Union of these United States, did “ordain and establish this Constitution of Texas” ([Preamble](#); [Article I, Section 1](#)).

This “people” have, first and foremost, authority to establish good government, to operate that government via the “republican” form, and to alter, reform, or even abolish that government, as they may think expedient ([Article I, Sections 1–2](#)). Therefore, as set forth in our Texas Constitution, the chief “liberties and rights” of this people are those of self-government. And the knowledge contemplated in Article VII—the goal of public education—is the knowledge necessary to popular self-government.

## III. The Knowledge We Need

### *Of Success, for Mutual Affection and Confidence*

What *knowledge* is necessary to the *preservation* of the rights of popular self-government? *At the outset is the knowledge necessary for mutual affection and confidence*, which we draw from three sources: first, knowledge of past good deeds, accomplished by We the People. Second, knowledge that is favorable and comparative. Of the latter, citizens should know the rarity of stable popular self-government and the great value of it. As Lincoln declared:

Upon the subject of education ... I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least, a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, *by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions* [emphasis added], appears to be an object of vital importance. ([Lincoln, 1832](#))

The third source of mutual affection and confidence is inclusive knowledge—that We the People exist—and as such have done well. In a multistate, multiracial, and multireligious republic, it is important to emphasize those facts, like the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, that establish both universal human rights and broad citizenship, and to emphasize those achievements to which a broad diversity of Americans have contributed, including the American Revolution, victory in world wars, and the Cold War; and the Civil Rights movement.

### *Of Failure, for Courage and Moderation*

The knowledge needed for mutual affection and confidence will allow our children to marvel at the fact that the United States is the first and most successful example of a political order based on a written Constitution. They will understand how wonderful it is that they live in one of the oldest polities in existence—having preserved essentially the same political institutions since the time of George III of England, Louis XVI of France, and Catherine the Great of Russia. It is remarkable how things have changed in the world and how, in a fundamental sense, unchanged the United States has been.

But the wonder must be sober. For this reason, *our children must know the failures of their political ancestors*, and their setbacks. If our ancestors were perfect, or moral giants, then we cannot profit from their example, for we are not giants. But if our ancestors, like us, failed, sometimes badly, then they are like us—we too fail, sometimes egregiously. But if we have failed like them, perhaps, with courage, we might succeed like them. Such knowledge should induce moderation, mutual forbearance, or civility. We should know that many of the same men and women who showed great virtues also showed great vices.

