

OCSS Position Statement on HB 164

“Student Religious Liberties Act”

11-26-2019

The Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS) believes the study of the world’s religions should be an essential part of the state’s social studies curriculum. Knowledge about diverse religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. However, the study of and expression of religion in social studies must be done in ways that are constitutionally and academically sound.

Last week, the Ohio House of Representatives passed House Bill 164 — the so-called “Student Religious Liberties Act” — which, if signed into law, would prohibit K-12 teachers from penalizing students for giving incorrect answers on tests or other schoolwork, if those facts conflict with their religious beliefs. It is the position of OCSS that this bill is unnecessary and has the potential to infringe on the academic integrity of teaching social studies in our state’s public schools. A vital element of a meaningful, robust, and rigorous social studies curriculum is to advance critical thinking, and to prepare youth to analyze and evaluate information rather than just remember it. In social studies, this means teaching critical thinking and media literacy skills where youth openly investigate compelling questions, compare competing claims, and assess the credibility of information. Our organization is concerned that if passed, House Bill 164

would curtail, possibly handcuff, and weaken the ability of our state's social studies teachers to help learners reach beyond their comfort zone to critically investigate information and media; an essential skill for active citizenship in our democracy.

The Ohio Council for the Social Studies is the state's premier voice for K-16 history and social studies professionals in Ohio. We advocate for the vital role of social studies in classrooms and communities and assist educators through professional development for the delivery of effective and innovative standards-based instruction.