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TESTIMONY: H. 3728  
BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

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I am Dr. Janelle Rivers, Education Advocacy Specialist for the League of Women Voters of South Carolina, and a retired South Carolina educator and administrator with four grandchildren who attend South Carolina public schools.

I will briefly mention four specific aspects of the current bill that are especially problematic.

One provision inhibits the teaching of current events by requiring the posting of public notice at least three-days prior to discussing the materials. That it will render our public schools less able to engage and motivate students.

Second, the opt-out provision that allows parents to withdraw their student from an instruction that they find objectionable has the potential to create massive scheduling and student-supervision problems.

A third provision allows any parent or guardian to bring a lawsuit against a teacher and possibly recover legal costs for any presumed instructional violation without even seeking available administrative remedies. This provision invites frivolous lawsuits that would discourage teachers and deplete district resources.

Fourth, if a district is ultimately found to have violated some provision of this bill, the district's state funding could be reduced by 5%. The predictable effect is that teachers will be warned to steer clear of difficult topics to avoid parental complaints.

Developing informed citizens requires that students learn about our historical successes and our failures--our ideals and our shortcomings. Our future citizens cannot solve social problems that they do not understand. They cannot make informed decisions if we restrict their opportunities to learn about the culture in which they live.

All of you know that South Carolina is facing a serious shortage of qualified applicants for teaching positions. There may be some teachers who need guidance, but threatening teachers and administrators with sanctions beyond those that already exist through usual administrative procedures will risk driving even more qualified people away from the teaching profession.

South Carolina has made remarkable progress in public education in the last century. Many middle-class citizens trust teachers and send their children to public schools. Hospitals and public schools have led the way in helping South Carolina achieve integrated systems of health care and public education. Now both systems are in jeopardy, especially in rural areas.

The newly created Teacher Task Force is studying the increasingly serious shortage of quality teacher education candidates. Salaries are too low, and the work environment is becoming toxic. A recent study revealed that lack of prestige and respect is one of the most important reasons why young people are choosing some other career (Croft, 2018).

Phi Delta Kappa has been conducting a national poll of Americans' ratings of public schools annually for 54 years. The 2022 data revealed this shocking result: "Just 37% of respondents in the national, random-sample survey would want a child of theirs to become a public-school teacher in their community. That's fewer than have said so in a similar question asked 13 times in PDK polls since 1969. It compares with 46% in 2018, a high of 75% in 1969, and a long-term average of 60%" (*PDK Poll | of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, n.d.).

This national teacher shortage has an intriguing regional aspect. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the vacant teaching positions are in the South (Merod, 2022). One conclusion is inescapable: there must be underlying cultural reasons for such a dramatic regional difference. Some of those cultural factors may be embedded in the history of our economy. This study suggests that simple short-term tactics are not likely to be effective. A serious long-term problem calls for a courageous and inventive long-term strategy.

This bill is part of a national trend of systematic attacks on public school systems. The effects of passing this bill will be detrimental for South Carolina's public schools. In today's knowledge-based economy, the quality of the public schools directly affects the quality of the workforce, and that affects the state's ability to attract new businesses.

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Croft, M., Guffy, G. and Vitale, D. (2018, June) ACT Research & Policy. Encouraging more high school students to consider teaching. <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/pdfs/Encouraging-More-HS-Students-to-Consider-Teaching.pdf>

Merod, A. (2022, August 26). *These 4 charts explain emerging teacher shortage data*. K-12 Dive. [https://www.k12dive.com/news/these-4-charts-explain-emerging-teacher-shortage-data/630558/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Issue:%202022-08-26%20K-12%20Dive%20%5Bissue:44139%5D&utm\\_term=K-12%20Dive](https://www.k12dive.com/news/these-4-charts-explain-emerging-teacher-shortage-data/630558/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Issue:%202022-08-26%20K-12%20Dive%20%5Bissue:44139%5D&utm_term=K-12%20Dive)

*PDK Poll | of the public's attitudes toward the public schools*. (n.d.). <https://pdkpoll.org/>

Lawmakers are charged with supporting and maintaining the public schools. If this bill becomes law, it will drive even more qualified candidates away from public education as a career choice. The damage to the public school system will be long-lasting. The League of Women Voters of South Carolina urges you to consider the long-term consequences of encouraging and supporting attacks on the public school system. We urge that you either vote against this bill or remove its harmful components.

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