



PO BOX 8453, COLUMBIA, SC, 29202, (803) 606-0431, WWW.LWVSC.ORG

TESTIMONY: H. 4325, H. 4343, H. 4392, H. 4605, H. 4799
BEFORE THE HOUSE EDUCATION AND PUBLIC WORKS FULL COMMITTEE

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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. My grandchildren attend public schools in Lexington-Richland Five and Spartanburg Five.

The League believes that the responsibility to determine educational policy and goals as a basis for selection and evaluation of content and methods belongs to state and local school boards. Local boards hire school and district administrators, who are responsible for overseeing the work of individual teachers and the appropriateness of their instruction. Our state's public education system is specifically designed to be responsive to parents, from its inclusive process for updating curriculum standards, to its elected school boards, to parent-teacher conferences.

If bills like these become law unintended consequences will follow. I will address only two of those unintended consequences.

First, such laws would encourage angry, fearful parents to by-pass local approaches to problem-solving and complain directly to legislators. If there are teachers or classroom substitutes who lack the training to handle difficult topics skillfully, they should be reported immediately to the supervising administrators. School and district administrators should investigate and act promptly to increase supervision, address misunderstandings, or consider other consequences, depending upon the accuracy of the report and the nature of the problem. Parents who bypass the schools and complain directly to lawmakers instead are inadvertently revealing a lot about their own temperaments and value systems. There is wisdom in refusing to pass a law will that fuel angry reactions from fearful parents and invite them to make even more demands as new concerns arise in the popular culture.

Some proposals go beyond K-12 to cover college education. By the time children reach the age of majority, good parental relationships are based more on influence than control. Practically speaking, 18-year-old students make their own choices. Parents can influence, but not control, the opinions of young adults who can legally choose to marry, serve in the military, and vote.

Second, these bills broadcast negative messages about the quality of public education. For over 20 years, lawmakers have sought to increase responsibilities while underfunding South

Carolina's public schools. When rhetoric and behavior are not aligned, truth lies in the behavior, and words ring hollow. Educators are right to question whether they are respected if people seek to micromanage their work while failing to provide adequate funding. Prospective teachers are right to question whether public schools are a place where their skills and talents will be respected by the public and its elected representatives.

Public school teachers and administrators deserve a level of support and respect that is commensurate with the responsibilities they manage. Please enact laws that support public schools and oppose bills like these. They would undermine our public education system.

Contact: Janelle Rivers, Ph.D., Education Advocacy Specialist LWVSC
803 667-6610 rivers12@bellsouth.net