



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
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March 23, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I write to express our views on H.R. 5, the Parents Bill of Rights Act.

Educators know that involving parents in their children's education is essential to student success. We need parent and family engagement, and we welcome Republicans' desire to be engaged in strengthening parents' involvement in schools. We have fought for parental engagement for generations, mostly on a classroom, school and district level, where the connection between parents and educators—the most important adults in students' lives—is real. But we must do it right; we can't make this work conditional on measures that will hurt kids, hurt parents who disagree with these conditions, or heap unnecessary burdens on educators' already-overflowing plates. We must listen when teachers and parents tell us what will actually help them, but we must also ensure we don't make it harder for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The Parents Bill of Rights Act gets an A for branding, but some of its provisions are genuinely concerning. The bill fails to acknowledge what is already widespread practice in schools—teachers collaborating with parents and families every day to meet the needs of kids and their communities. While it is great to reaffirm current law and practice encouraging parental involvement in schools, why not build on what Congress has already enacted, on a mostly bipartisan basis, by considering what families need and what educators need to support families. We embrace the desire of both Democrats and Republicans to strengthen parental engagement. And we encourage our representatives to spend more time in the classroom with our members to see all the ways we engage parents and where we could use support in helping our kids succeed.

We are concerned about aspects of H.R. 5 that would require schools to divert their limited resources from teaching kids and open avenues for bad actors to censor education, ban books and harm children who are just trying to be themselves and live their lives in peace. That is why we support Rep. Suzanne Bonamici's substitute amendment (#40) and urge its adoption by the full House. This amendment keeps some of the positive aspects of H.R. 5, and it amends the parts that would hurt our most vulnerable students and make educators' jobs harder, replacing them with

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.



measures that would invest in and support student learning, a goal Democrats and Republicans can all get behind.

The Bonamici amendment proposes a real pathway to improving parental engagement by calling for parent coordinators and increasing funding for family engagement centers and community schools. It also removes parts of the bill that would harm kids, eliminating measures that would target trans kids and restrict the teaching of Black history; Latino history; Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander history; LGBTQIA+ history; women's history; Native American history; and the history of the Holocaust or antisemitism. And it would ban book bans, putting decisions about who is allowed to read certain books in the hands of parents, not the government. This would ensure that parents who want their children to have access to books have the same rights as parents who don't want their children reading particular books.

While we are pleased that the Rules Committee provides for consideration of the Bonamici substitute, it is disappointing that the final rule does not allow for consideration of other important amendments to H.R. 5 focusing on what our students need, such as:

- Providing parents with more leave so they can attend parent-teacher conferences and school events;
- Increasing students' access to mental health professionals;
- Enacting gun safety measures that keep our kids safe and protect parents from the unimaginable;
- Supporting increasing starting teachers' pay to \$60,000 a year, so we can start addressing the teacher shortage;
- Increasing funding to support our most vulnerable schools and students;
- Helping school districts recruit and train diverse teachers to alleviate the teacher shortage; and
- Increasing students' access to healthy meals.

We will outline our positions on the amendments made in order in a subsequent message to the full House later today.

We want to ensure any action Congress takes supports, not undermines, the capacity of schools and educators to fulfill their responsibilities. And that is what parents and voters want too. Our recent [polling](#) demonstrates clearly that voters overwhelmingly reject the increasing polarization and division in schools. Instead, voters favor solutions like investing in public schools and providing educators with the resources they need to create safe and welcoming environments; boosting academic skills; and paving pathways to career, college and beyond.

We are glad Republicans are thinking about parents and want to address the issues keeping them up at night, but H.R. 5 fails to deliver on what parents want and kids need to succeed. Our students and their families face new and emerging challenges that the House should be focusing on today, working to advance solutions that protect our nation's students, value our parents and support our educators. Unfortunately, H.R. 5 does not meet that standard, and, at a minimum, it must be amended to include the Bonamici substitute.

Thank you for considering our views on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Randi Weingarten
President, American Federation of Teachers

RW : emc opeiu #2 afl-cio