

February 21, 2019

Testimony to House Committee on Education; HB 2288

Chair, Representative Steve Huebert; Vice-Chair Representative Brenda Dietrich; Ranking Minority Member Representative Jim Ward

Mr. Chair and Committee Members:

House Bill 2288 simply reaffirms and solidifies students and school employees Constitutional right to free speech. I brought this bill for several reasons:

Academic freedom derives from the right to free speech.

Public school employees and students are being threatened by out-of-state special interest groups to stop exercising their rights or face consequences.

In addition, I experienced this firsthand as a principal. When faced with a situation that did not violate any board policy, law or ethical standards but conflicted with my deeply held religious beliefs, I was told by my superiors that, "You have to leave your religious beliefs at the door when you come to school," and "maybe you need to find something else to do." I was not pushing my beliefs on anyone else. In fact, the students and staff at my building did not know this was happening at the time.

This bill reinforces that:

Prayer should be voluntary, student-initiated and student-led and that school district employees can participate in the employee's personal capacity and not as a representative of the school.

Staff members must maintain a neutral position regarding religious when performing their job duties. They cannot proselytize.

No one is required to participate in any religious activity,

It's unfortunate that a bill like this is necessary. However, when outside groups attack our Constitutional rights and freedoms, we must defend them.