



**January 24, 2023**

**Public Comments**

**South Carolina House Education and Public Works K-12 Subcommittee**

**433 Blatt Building**

**Columbia, South Carolina 29201**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the House K-12 Education Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comments related to H. 3728, the South Carolina Transparency and Integrity in Education Act. My name is Fred Jones, and I'm the Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Southern Education Foundation. I'm also a resident of Colleton County, and most importantly, I'm a father of two beautiful young children. I write to voice my complete opposition to the classroom censorship legislation up for discussion this afternoon.

Whether white or Black, Latinx or Asian, all of our children deserve the right to learn the full story of America's diverse history as a country. What makes the United States great, in part, is that we can celebrate our country's triumphs without shying away from the mistakes of its past. In fact, our willingness to admit our missteps as a nation and our movement toward greater justice for all distinguishes us from many countries around the world. Instead of turning our schools into political battlegrounds where children would be the collateral damage, we should focus our time and resources instead to ensure that every student has the support and resources they need to learn, grow, and thrive, inside and outside the classroom.

I would like to share two very important facts with this committee.

**Fact #1: 75% of Americans** believe that banning books and limiting educators from teaching about the history of race and racism is *not* in the best interest of children. Most parents of all backgrounds want their children's education to be honestly presented in classrooms where students are loved, valued, and fully accepted and using curricula that set children up to succeed in life. When we restrict, ban or even discourage teaching and learning about history, civil rights, and race, we undermine our children's ability to learn how to successfully navigate complex situations. We need to remember our shared goal: to give our children the best education we can, with teachers allowed to teach as they've always tried to do, with honesty, accuracy, and integrity, and by students learning how to talk things out even when they might disagree or come from different perspectives.

And **Fact #2: Students learn best in environments where they can feel safe, even when learning or talking about complex issues.** Students learn best in environments with low fear and high trust. Creating a supportive environment to discuss and explore difficult issues helps students from all backgrounds feel welcome and increases that trust, ensuring that schools can be hubs of learning and improvement. On the other hand, classroom censorship legislation, like H. 3728, undermines this trust by preventing students from learning how to talk about challenging issues, making it harder for them to navigate a more diverse school system and unique world.

**In closing,** the legislation put before you will restrict how we can talk about the likes of great South Carolinians and American heroes like Robert Smalls, who once held your very position as a member of the South Carolina House and helped establish compulsory public education in South Carolina during Reconstruction. On his own, he captured a confederate ship and freed multiple families, including his own, who were enslaved. H. 3728 jeopardizes my children's ability to learn in a factual way about this patriotic, courageous figure in the history of our state and our nation, which I find extremely disheartening.

With that said, I urge you to vote no on H. 3728. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Fred Jones