

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1202
Public Schools – Content Standards, Curriculum, and Bullying Policies:
Culture and History of Palestine
House Ways and Means Committee

Dear Chair and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 1202.

HB 1202 is an important and thoughtful bill because it addresses a real educational gap in Maryland public schools. The bill recognizes that schools have a duty to provide inclusive, accurate, and age-appropriate education that promotes cultural understanding, critical thinking, and respect for human dignity. It further recognizes that the absence of foundational literacy regarding Palestine and Palestinian identity can contribute to stereotyping, misinformation, and dehumanization.

This legislation is especially important because students should be exposed to more than one perspective when learning about the history of the Middle East. For too long, the Palestinian side of the story has too often been absent, minimized, or presented only in connection with violence and conflict. A sound education should also include the historical presence of Palestinians in the region, Palestinian cultural, religious, linguistic, and social traditions, and the impact of displacement, statelessness, and conflict on Palestinian civilians. HB 1202 specifically includes those subjects in the required content standards.

Just as importantly, the bill is carefully drafted to promote education rather than ideology. It requires that instruction be factual, historically grounded, and nonpartisan. It emphasizes critical thinking, media literacy, and respectful dialogue. It also expressly provides that nothing in the bill requires political advocacy, limits discussion of multiple historical perspectives, or infringes on the constitutional rights of teachers or students. Those safeguards are essential and make clear that the purpose of the bill is not to silence anyone, but to broaden understanding.

HB 1202 also recognizes that education and school climate are connected. By including anti-Palestinian bias within bullying policy, the bill affirms that Palestinian students and families deserve the same dignity, safety, and protection from harassment as any other members of the school community.

A fuller and more balanced teaching of Middle East history does not weaken education; it strengthens it. When students are given access to multiple perspectives, they are better equipped to think critically, engage respectfully, and recognize the humanity of others. That is one of the central promises of public education, and HB 1202 helps Maryland move closer to fulfilling it.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 1202.

Respectfully submitted,

Grady O’Rear
Frederick, Maryland
Frederick for Justice in Palestine