



# TESTIMONY

April 26, 2022

## HB 1858: PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

*By Patrick Ishmael*

Testimony before the Missouri Senate Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. My name is Patrick Ishmael, and I am the director of government accountability for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state policy. The ideas presented here are my own.

When reformers talk about transparency in government, one thing we often compare it to is sunlight. As the saying goes, “sunlight is the best disinfectant,” meaning that when government actions are exposed to the judgment of the public, government and its bureaucrats tend to behave better. On the one hand, government excesses are easier to detect; on the other, a culture of transparency signals to bureaucrats that wrongdoing will be known, and thus the wrongdoing is less likely to happen.

For years, the Show-Me Institute has advocated for transparency at both

the state and local levels, sending thousands of Sunshine Law requests to government entities to see how billions of dollars of tax money were being spent, to discover and review the terms of labor contracts the state sometimes didn't know existed, and to ensure that government was generally conducting itself in honorable and appropriate ways.

When the Institute started exploring curricula amidst public concerns about dubious instructional content in K-12 schools, we were startled to find that, contrary to representations by the governor and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, critical race theory (CRT) content was appearing in curricula across the state. Whatever the reason for those misrepresentations—whether they were made intentionally or arose from ignorance—it's clear that taxpayers and parents need their rights to direct and oversee Missouri schools reaffirmed in substantive ways.

ADVANCING LIBERTY WITH RESPONSIBILITY  
BY PROMOTING MARKET SOLUTIONS  
FOR MISSOURI PUBLIC POLICY

Lastly, for those of you who may have a general bias toward schools and districts against the prerogatives of the state, I empathize with your tendency toward local control. But “local control” is one means to achieving small, efficient and effective government, not its end. Like President Ronald Reagan once said, trust is not enough when it comes to government—sometimes you also have to “verify” that it’s following through on its promises.

This Parents’ Bill of Rights will help to ensure promises and representations about our K-12 schooling are verified, and that’s a needed improvement for parents, taxpayers, districts, and the state itself. Let the sunshine in.



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