

Proponent Written Testimony of SB 381
For the Senate Education Committee
February 11, 2026
Trish O’Neal, concerned citizen, on my own behalf

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a concerned citizen on my own behalf, in support of SB 381.

Accountability drives priorities. When a subject is measured, reported, and taken seriously, it receives the focus it deserves. When it is not, it too often becomes secondary. We have seen this reality in Kansas education. Left to their own governance, Kansas schools have experienced declines in NAEP scores and ACT scores, while assessment cut scores have been lowered to match those outcomes. SB 381 provides accountability.

Today, any Kansan can visit the Kansas State Department of Education website and easily see how schools—both statewide and locally—are performing in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Yet there is no comparable, transparent public reporting for History, Geography, Social Studies, or Civics. This is despite the fact that a statewide Social Studies assessment is already required by law under K.S.A. 72-5170.

SB 381 addresses this gap directly. It provides assurance to parents, taxpayers, and policymakers that civics education is not only taught, but learned, before Kansas students graduate. Our country and our state depend on citizens who understand history, political systems, and the real-world consequences of political ideologies.

This is the right time for this bill. Kansas academic standards are reviewed every seven years, and the History, Geography, and Social Studies standards were last updated in 2000. But those standards are so vague that in 2024 the Department issued a “Toolkit” to help teachers interpret them. That Toolkit states that it was created to “reduce the time and effort required to...make sense of the standards.” When teachers need supplemental guidance simply to understand the standards, that may be a signal that the standards themselves are inadequate.

Independent evaluations confirm this concern. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which reviews and rates all state K–12 history and civics standards, gave Kansas a C minus for Civics, defined as “mediocre,” and a D plus for U.S. History, defined as “inadequate.”

Under the New Section 1 of SB 381, our Kansas students will receive a more solid foundation in the history and tenets of Communism and Socialism. These ideologies have shaped global history, dismantled private property rights, concentrated power in the state, and

resulted in immense human suffering under authoritarian regimes. Students should graduate understanding not just the theory behind these systems, but their historical consequences.

Age-appropriate curriculum—from elementary through high school—is already readily available through the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. That Foundation was authorized by a *unanimous* Act of Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993, reflecting broad bipartisan recognition of the importance of teaching the history of communism accurately.

The goals of SB 381 are also part of a growing national movement. Similar legislation has been enacted in Florida. At the federal level, the Crucial Communism Teaching Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives in 2024 by a bipartisan vote of 327–62. Although it was not taken up by the U.S. Senate, the bill has been reintroduced by a Florida Representative whose family fled Cuba—bringing firsthand understanding of the need for students to learn what communist regimes have done in practice. These efforts reflect the widely recognized reality that communist regimes have resulted in death and poverty worldwide.

Closer to home, during a 2022 presentation to the House Education Committee, a Kansas State Department of Education curriculum director stated that it is “a problem” if students don’t know the *consequences* of private property ownership in the United States. Would our students know that the abolition of private property is a core tenet of Marxist communism? Would they understand how fundamentally different that ideology is from the freedom and capitalism we enjoy in the United States?

I hope SB 381 will serve as a necessary nudge for our State Department of Education and the State Board to do better—to follow research, revamp its guidance for History, Geography, and Social Studies during the upcoming standards review, and to incorporate the expectations outlined in this bill.

Finally, in 2022 in Washington, D.C., the Victims of Communism Museum opened—a permanent reminder that these lessons are not theoretical. They are written in the lives and deaths of real people. Communist regimes have been responsible for the deaths of more than 100 million people worldwide.

SB 381 ensures that Kansas students graduate informed, prepared, and capable of evaluating political ideas through the lens of history and evidence. I respectfully urge the committee to support this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Resource links are provided below:

Current History, Geography, and Social Studies (HGSS) Standards document (pdf): [LinkClick.aspx](#)

KSDE Social Studies, History, and Geography webpage with guidance documents: [History, Government, and Social Studies \(HGSS\)](#)

Archived video of the March 16, 2022 House Education Committee meeting: [House Committee on Education 03/16/2022](#) Discussion of HGSS begins slightly before half.