



AFT-NH Testimony on HB 1206
From Debrah Howes, President AFT-NH

Thank you, Chair Ladd and Members of the House Education Committee.

My name is Debrah Howes. I am president of the American Federation of Teachers – New Hampshire. I am here to speak on behalf of our 3700 members across the state. Our members include preK through 12 public school educators and support staff, university faculty as well as town employees. I am here today to testify in opposition to **HB 1206**.

HB 1206 is a proposal that does nothing to help our public school students learn, grow and thrive. With its Orwellian name “Education not Indoctrination” and through its text, the bill creates the misleading impression that our public schools are engaging in indoctrination. That is patently offensive to the many hardworking teachers, paraeducators, counselors, administrators and other school staff who work hard every day to educate Granite State students, for a lot less money than they could make in private industry. And they do it because they care about helping students learn, grow, and thrive. Teachers work hard to show students where to look for information, how to find primary sources, how to observe and note scientific data so students can form their own conclusions. This bill is based on a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what we do in public schools. It creates yet another vague and ill-defined standard that will interfere in public school classrooms and keep students from getting the robust education that is their constitutional right in New Hampshire.

The bill also prohibits presenting any “unproven theory” as if it were fact. That makes teaching science and social studies much more difficult. Gravity is a theory. Capitalism, free markets and supply and demand are also only theories. Who gets to decide when a theory has been tested enough that it can be presented in a public school under this bill without running afoul of the Indoctrination law? Will there be an “Education not Indoctrination Committee” that gets to make that decision?

Simply put, this is another classroom censorship bill that will make it harder for teachers to teach and students to learn. Teachers will be second guessing whether any given assignment, book or comment violates this bill. It will add to the already huge levels of fear and stress in our public schools that is forcing educators out of the profession. And students aren’t immune to stress this kind of censorship creates. The effect will be to make our public schools less welcoming to all students in our communities. How do we know this? We have seen the effect of the similarly vague Divisive Concepts law, which failed to define its vague terms and also threatened teachers and school staff with possible loss of license if they violated them. Since that law took effect, we have also seen some extremists insist that any recognition of students who are LGBTQ or of family structures that consist of two moms, or two dads is “gender ideology” and should be punished under the Divisive Concepts law. They have succeeded in getting staff investigated and harassed but have not been able to claim any legal victories because showing respect to all our students and their families is not an ideology, it is simple human kindness. However, it is not a leap to think that these same extremists would use this bill, if it became law, to try to persecute public school staff for displaying a rainbow flag or a simple sign that reads “All are Welcome Here.”

The bottom line is that every Granite State student has a constitutional right to a robust public education and the state of New Hampshire has an obligation to fund it so that it is just as robust in Franklin, Claremont and Berlin as it is in Bedford, Hanover and Windham. Putting laws like this in the way of students being able feel like they are welcome and belong, like they are full members of their classroom communities is wrong for our students, for our public schools, for our teachers and school staff and for the Granite State.

I urge you to find **HB 1206 Inexpedient to Legislate**.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes

Debrah Howes

President, AFT-New Hampshire

.+