

Dear Committee Members,

I urge you to oppose HB 1132, which would ban all flags from NH public schools except the US flag, NH flag, and POW/MIA flag. This bill is an unnecessary state overreach into how our teachers conduct their classrooms. As a former student, I think it's wonderful teachers are able to use flags to teach children about all sorts of countries and cultures around the world. Back when I attended primary school at St. Anthony's elementary school, one event we looked forward to every year was Christmas around the world, where every classroom in the school would pick a country and we would get to see how that country celebrates Christmas, including songs, clothing, traditions, flags, and food that we would bring in. For another project in junior high, our class made a quilt where we each student made a patch representing ourselves. Many students included flags honoring their heritage, such as French, Italian, Irish, and Japanese flags, and I believe the quilt was displayed in the classroom until the end of the semester. It gave us all a sense of accomplishment and inclusion learning about who we were and displaying it to the class. Under this new bill, it's not clear whether a public school teacher would legally be allowed to do such a positive class activity today as that quilt activity; it seems to me it would not be except under the category of "Flags used for instruction in foreign languages, world geography, and United States history class."

Moreover, it is not lost on me, and many others in the LGBT community, that this bill is part of a nationwide slate of legislation meant to implement a ban on pride flags from classrooms. Despite lack of any mention of Pride flags in the bill, it is clear who this bill is targeting, and why. The supporters of this legislation do so because they are uncomfortable seeing pride flags and uncomfortable with the inclusion of LGBT kids in the classroom, as evidenced by much of the remote testimony for this bill. When a scared, young gay kid sees a rainbow flag in a classroom, he takes that he's safe, that he belongs, and that he'll be accepted as he is. That his teacher is a safe person to talk to and confide in, even if he doesn't feel accepted at home or safe coming out to his parents. I was one of those kids. I want all kids, including LGBT kids and kids from different national backgrounds, to feel like public school classrooms are safe places to learn where they belong. I want my friends who are teachers to be able to support their students without being reported by close-minded parents and being forced to go through disciplinary hearings. Keep New Hampshire a welcoming state, and keep our classrooms welcoming places for every child to learn. Vote NO on HB 1132.

Sincerely,
Matthew Richards
Manchester, NH