



A legislative update from  
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**From the desk of Rep. Kelly**

Dear Neighbor,

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. After a tumultuous past few years where we have all struggled to cope with the pandemic, mental health care is more important than ever. House Democrats are focused on enacting legislation that ensures that every Ohioan, no matter their background, is able to access quality mental health care.

Some of our bills focused on mental health include:

- HB 602—To ensure mental health access for all those who voluntarily seek help;
- HB 363—To provide mental health services in the event of a pandemic, natural disaster, or other emergency;
- HB 41—To create additional safety and security measures for mental health professionals;
- HB 453—To create the “Recovery is Beautiful” license plate, to support individuals recovering from mental health or substance abuse issues;
- HB 591—To designate the last week in February as “Eating Disorders Awareness Week.”

Democrats are working for you, and working for Ohio. During this Mental Health Awareness Month, be sure to take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office with any questions, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,

Rep. Brigid Kelly

**Jewish American Heritage Month**

May is Jewish American Heritage Month, a time to pay tribute to the generations of Jewish Americans who helped form the fabric of American history, culture and society.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents in Ohio rose to a 40-year high in 2020, with a 72 percent increase in events from the year before.

HB 341 would create the Bureau of Hate Crimes to conduct independent investigations for hate crimes when sufficient cause exists. This bill would send a strong message of solidarity to at-risk communities by focusing resources not only on deterrence, but prosecution of hate crimes. All Ohioans deserve to be able to live safely and securely in our state.

**Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month**

This Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, House Democrats are celebrating the vibrant and diverse traditions and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. As hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise, we also reaffirm our commitment to stopping Asian hate and ensuring all Ohioans can live with safety and security.

Democrats have introduced legislation to create the Ohio Asian-American and Pacific Islander Affairs Commission and the Office of Asian-American and Pacific Islander Affairs to address the injustices of the past and understand the unique difficulties and needs of the Asian American and Pacific Islander population in Ohio.



## Democrats condemn introduction of 'Don't Say Gay' bill

Democrats condemned the recent introduction of [House Bill \(HB\) 616](#), the Ohio Republican version of Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' law. Under HB 616, schools could not "teach, use, or provide any curriculum or instructional materials on sexual orientation or gender identity" in kindergarten through third grade. Additionally, older students could not be taught "any curriculum or instructional materials on sexual orientation or gender identity in any manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards."

HB 616 is simply the latest draconian censorship bill introduced this General Assembly by House Republicans. Republicans also sponsored HB 327, which would make "failing to fairly present both sides of a political or ideological belief or position" conduct unbecoming of an Ohio educator, prompting [widespread alarm](#) from teachers and concerned parents. HB 327 has received five hearings in the House State and Local Government committee, and was nearing a committee vote until the Republican bill sponsor [made inaccurate and anti-Semitic comments about the Holocaust](#) during an interview.

While Republicans continue [their attacks on LGBTQ+ Ohioans](#), Democrats are calling for action on the [Ohio Fairness Act](#), bipartisan legislation that would protect LGBTQ+ Ohioans from discrimination in employment, housing and accommodations. The Ohio Fairness Act was introduced in March 2021, but has yet to receive a single hearing.

The majority of Ohio business owners support adding LGBTQ+ non-discrimination to Ohio law, with [more than 50 percent saying nondiscrimination laws improve businesses' bottom lines](#). [More than 800 leading Ohio businesses and organizations](#) have backed the Ohio Fairness Act, which they say will attract workers, increase investment and grow the state's economy. Conversely, business-minded organizations have expressed concerns behind closed doors about the legal uncertainty these Republican censorship bills would impose.

These censorship bills are bad for students, bad for educators, bad for business and bad for our state.



## Democrats commit to investing in students, educators



This May, Democrats are recognizing and celebrating our educators in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week and Bus Drivers Appreciation Day. House Democrats thank all our educators and school staff who work hard each and every day to ensure our children and students are receiving the best education and care possible.

Democrats know that better lives and brighter futures starts in the classroom. That's why we support legislation to guarantee every Ohioan, no matter where they live, has a quality education. Democrats delivered a major win for

education by passing the Fair School Funding Plan in the 2022-2023 state budget. The Fair School Funding Plan invests in students and ensures that schools get the funds they need to succeed.

Democrats also supported bipartisan legislation to reform the state report card system. The reformed system makes improvements in accurately and equitably rating our schools, and will better reflect the hard work of our educators and children.

We have also introduced several other bills to better support our students and educators, including:

- HB 333—To create a specialized school counselor job description;
- HB 353—The Testing Your Faith Act, to guarantee students of higher education have absences for religious obligations;
- HB 619—To allow school districts to permit student mental health days.

Thank you, teachers, administrators, and staff, for all you do!