

The Honorable Stanley Saylor
Majority Chairman
House Education Committee
P.O. Box 202094
Room 105 Ryan Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

September 16, 2016

Dear Chairman Saylor and Members of the House Education and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees,

I write to indicate my strong support for House Bill No. 1858.

As you know, better than most of us, our Democracy requires constant maintenance, and preservation of our freedom requires constant vigilance. One of our nation's founding fathers, John Adams, said, "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people... ." Stated simply, an informed citizenry is necessary to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States, and of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is our responsibility to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have the fundamental knowledge necessary to become engaged citizens. House Bill No. 1858 seeks to educate our youth on the founding principles and values of our nation. This is part of a nation wide effort — The Civics Education Initiative.

According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, only 24% of U.S. high school students are proficient in civics and studies by the Annenberg Public Policy Center show that a third of U.S. citizens can't name even one branch of our federal government. Fewer than 5% of high school students could pass the same basic civics test that all immigrants must pass before becoming U.S. citizens.

We have an absolute obligation to provide our young citizens with the tools and knowledge that will allow them to become engaged, informed, and interested enough to understand that our freedom was and must be fought for and protected. Generations of our leaders, from Jefferson on, knew that engaging and informing the next generation on civics is vital to the survival of our republic. Unfortunately, today few American students understand basic facts about our government, its creation, or how it works.

Nine states passed similar legislation in 2015 and twenty-six additional states are considering legislation for 2016. Pennsylvania should lead in this initiative. House Bill No. 1858 is a good start. It would require Pennsylvania high school students to score at least 60% on the civics portion of the naturalization test used by the U.S. Citizenship and Naturalization Services.

As a veteran of the Air Force and Viet Nam, I ask your support for this legislation to ensure that all high school students learn the important basic facts about our nation, our government, our values, and their responsibilities in order to be active citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William B. Lynch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "W".

William B. Lynch
Major General (ret.) USAF