Good morning. My name is Carrie Griffith, policy specialist for the Texas State Teachers Association. I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 3 and here representing our 65,000 members. I am also a former long-time classroom teacher, curriculum specialist and instructional coach so come with a unique capacity to see all the way around the proposed legislation and how it would impact Texas classrooms.

My written testimony addresses the many aspects of SB 3 with which we are opposed, but this morning I want to speak more specifically to what I can only assume to be an unintended consequence, and one that maybe hasn’t been considered fully or with the insights of an educator. And that is the impact this legislation would have on classroom rigor and by extension college and career readiness.

Rigor is a mainstay in policy conversations because of its connotative traction, but as an educator I want to talk about what a rigorous education actually looks like and how it would be extinguished under SB 3.

A framework commonplace to educators is Bloom’s Taxonomy, a framework that effectively measures rigor. Bloom’s Taxonomy categorizes along a continuum the level of cognition required for certain academic tasks. The most basic is recall and the more advanced is evaluation. The higher order categories involve the breaking apart and putting together again of concepts and ideas, ultimately developing the capacity of a student to identify and solve problems.

Our best educators design lessons that require students to engage in higher order thinking and facilitate in students the capacity to ask the hard questions.

The most successful students are the ones that develop the skills to work collectively and collaboratively to answer the hard questions, to know when there is more than one answer and to know to keep asking questions. Students with rigorous classroom experiences are more prepared to engage in college level coursework and enter the workforce with the competencies necessary for career readiness, such as critical thinking.

This is rigor, and this is something the most masterful teachers know how to do well.

The T-TESS — the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System — is the tool used in most Texas schools to evaluate educators. The features an appraiser looks for in evaluating an educator are features that describe rigor.

For example, distinguished teachers as defined by T-TESS, “provide opportunities for students to generate questions that lead to further inquiry, higher order thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application”

Although Texas appears to support the notion of classroom rigor, given its evaluation instrument and the rhetoric of other common policy conversations, the language of SB 3 restrains educator speech in such a way that classrooms will devolve from anything approximating distinguished teaching. Classrooms will move from ones that are asking how and why to ones that stop at asking students to recall the date of the War of 1812.
One TSTA member noted, “when educators are explicitly forbidden to teach certain things, the effect is inevitably subversion, avoidance or superficiality.”

Although SB 3 has a provision amended into HB 3979 that protects student speech, this falls flat when teachers are no longer able to incubate thought or facilitate healthy, respectful discussions in the classroom.

We are all familiar with the statistics describing the exodus of teachers from the profession in the first five years. This bill will lead to even more devastating numbers because of its attack on process. When an educator is denied the latitude to grow learners into thinkers according to their professional resolve — when rigor becomes against the law — then education itself is being attacked.