



Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 327, regarding the teaching of certain current events, race, and sex. My name is Maria Bruno, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the Public Policy Director at Equality Ohio.

Equality Ohio believes that honesty in education and a dynamic, challenging, and supportive learning environment should be core values of Ohio's public school system. HB 327 is inconsistent with these values by inhibiting a school district's ability to enforce its code of conduct policies for students and staff, and places school districts in a precarious financial position due to the threat of lawsuits and revocations of funding.

HB327 will chill speech in the classroom by creating uncertainty surrounding what can and cannot be taught in Ohio's education system. This comes at a time when teachers and school districts are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress. A recent study found that 1 in 4 teachers are considering leaving the profession after the last year, with some teachers citing the passage of these laws as a reason.

More generally, we object to this bill because it's impossible to understand the context of modern history without an understanding of our social issues, including sex and gender. Teaching kids to have difficult, thoughtful conversations is an important part of life. It's okay and even expected to interpret certain historical events or groups that promoted hatred and violence (the KKK, the Tulsa Race Massacre, the Jewish Holocaust, etc.) were bad. Educating young people includes teaching them how to effectively convey complicated ideas and advocate for what they believe in, while also building responsible citizens. This bill would punish teachers who push their students to consider the basic moral consequences of major historical events.

HB327 risks school funding by creating vague standards for our public education systems, and then threatening to revoke significant amounts of funding if these standards are not met. A single angry parent could pursue harmful civil lawsuits over course curriculum, threatening a school district's access to funding and the personal lives of teachers they dislike. This puts school districts in an unnecessarily precarious position.

This bill also inhibits the power of a school district to act in accordance with their own code of conduct due to their inability to enforce student code of conduct



guidelines and continue education on current events and topics surrounding race, sex, and gender as they see fit.

HB 327 not only harms K-12 education, but also creates new legal and financial risks for Ohio's prestigious institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities are key to drawing young people to the state of Ohio. HB327 directly harms the academic freedom of professors and students, which will inhibit student recruitment. If this bill were to pass, it would be detrimental to the reputation of our state's undergraduate and graduate humanities programs. In the end, this bill would immediately invite expensive lawsuits that ultimately would be struck down by decades of court precedent protecting collegiate academic freedom.

All students in Ohio's public schools system deserve a fair and honest education with the highest quality of education available. This piece of legislation does not uphold that academic standard. This bill is instead likely to result in more harm and risk to students, teachers, and school districts. For those reasons, Equality Ohio asks this committee not to pass HB327.