

Testimony on Substitute House Bill 327
Shelly Saltzman
State and Local Government Committee
September 17, 2021

Chairman Scott Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman Marilyn John, Ranking Member Representative Brigid Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Shelly Saltzman. I am a retired teacher, school leader, and school founder. I strongly oppose Substitute House Bill 327.

I am also now part of Honesty for Ohio Education, a new non-partisan grassroots group that is working to make sure that Ohio education delves into the complete history of our country from multiple perspectives particularly with regard to race and racism. There are many aspects of both HB 322 and Sub HB 327 which are problematic, but I will concentrate on the fact that they strive to whitewash American history and demonize Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs. I will also discuss the anti-CRT campaign that is not mentioned in the bills but is clearly the foundation for both bills.

I recently attended The City Club of Cleveland forum with Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries of The Ohio State University, and I was struck how he clarified and simplified the whole CRT controversy. Importantly, he said when asked if CRT is taught in k-12 schools, the answer should be “no” because Critical Race Theory is a graduate-level investigation, but the answer should not stop there. It has to be a “no but” answer. No, we don’t teach CRT, but we do teach about race and racism throughout the history of our country and in the present. If we don’t teach our students about the systemic inequities in the past and present, they won’t be prepared to lead us forward to combat those inequities.

This teaching has to be woven into social studies and language arts, and DEI teaching needs to be embedded into advisory and community meetings. These bills won’t allow action civics - one of the most important things we can teach students to do. We need to teach students to advocate for causes in which they believe. These bills and their proponents claim that social-emotional learning and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs take away from academics, but in reality, social-emotional learning and DEI make us better human beings more capable to think critically and problem solve.

This teaching needs to happen everywhere, but just as it is important for the brown and black children of our state to hear the narratives of their ancestors and see the data in multiple sectors about the inequities that have held their families back and the history that has been whitewashed, **this teaching desperately needs to happen in the white suburban schools because white people have to uncover their racial biases. Making change toward a more equitable country must include a lot of white people’s work - I can say that because I am a privileged white woman. It’s okay to feel uncomfortable as we learn about our privilege.**

These bills ban discussions that help us grow as human beings. This teaching needs to be un-teaching the assumptions and incomplete history many of us were taught. Unless we learn the hard truths about systemic racism and unconscious bias, we can't move forward to right the wrongs of the past and the present. Substitute HB 327 extends the ban on teaching about systemic racism and implementing DEI programs to higher education and "political subdivisions" which I believe includes police and fire departments and similar government departments that so badly need to face the systemic issues that have created inequities in their ranks.

HB 322 and Substitute HB 327 will make sure we don't learn the hard truths, that we continue to whitewash history, and that we continue to ignore harmful biases that stop us from eliminating the inequities that hurt us all.

I am particularly alarmed about how the even the potential of these bills passing has intimidated teachers, administrators and school board members. Many who believe passionately about honesty in Ohio education refuse to testify because of actual threats and targeting; they fear for their jobs and their physical and emotional safety. This is eerily reminiscent of the atmosphere of Germany in the 1930s.

I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing Substitute H.B. 327 and vote NO on this dangerous bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Saltzman
Gates Mills