

House State and Local Government Committee
September 22, 2021
Testimony on HB 322 and HB 327
Ann Brennan, Executive Director, Ohio School Psychologists Association

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Representative Kelly, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 322 and HB 327. I am Ann Brennan, the Executive Director of the Ohio School Psychologists Association (OSPA) and my testimony will focus on the impact these bills will have on the professional judgement of school psychologists and other educators as they strive to meet the behavioral health and instructional needs of Ohio's diverse student population.

The OSPA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee recently adopted a response statement to HB 322 and HB 327, articulating the following concerns of school psychologists across the state:

- HB 322 bans the teaching of certain “current events, race and sex related topics if considered to be prohibited content”.
- House Bill 327 prohibits “teaching, advocating, or promoting divisive concepts.”
- Such legislative measures are disconcerting because they would set back our progress in addressing systemic issues of bias and limit language towards an inclusive education for all children.
- The American educational arena has a long history of experiencing racism and bias, such as separate but equal doctrines, nine Black students being escorted by troops to integrate Little Rock Central School and Ruby Bridges requiring armed escort into a New Orleans Elementary school.
- For many People of Color, the impact of these past events coupled with tragic current events touches their daily lives and affects their ability to thrive in school.
- Additional facts worthy of consideration that contribute to these inequities are: 1) The predominance of curriculum that excludes the history and lived experiences of Americans of Color and imposes a primarily White narrative of history; 2) Deficit-oriented instruction that characterizes Students of Color as in need of remediation; 3) Narrow assessments, the

results of which are used to confirm narratives about the educability of children of color; 4) School discipline policies that disproportionately impact students of color and compromise their educational outcomes (such as dress code policies prohibiting natural Black hairstyles); 5) School disciplinary and exclusionary practices that continue to remain more draconian and harsh towards Black and other students of Color compared to their White counterparts; 6) School funding inequities in urbanized areas, including the persistent underfunding of property-poor districts, many of which are composed primarily of Children of Color; and 7) The persistence of racially segregated education within many communities, perpetuating historic “red lining” of community borders..

Many educators fear that HB 327 and 322 could lead to censorship of their curricular content and impact educational opportunities for students to explore historical events, relevant literature, and remarkable contributions of diverse Americans. Talking about diversity and teaching about the different ways it affects people can help children and teens navigate and understand systems of inequity to create a better nation.

As school psychologists, it is our ethical and legal duty to promote and advocate for an equitable and high quality education for all students - regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, gender expression, sex, or disability. Banning these forms of scholarly inquiry from occurring in our schools is detrimental to promoting an open environment that seeks to produce student scholars who can discuss justice, equity, diversity, and inclusiveness, which are essential 21st century knowledge concepts in today’s global society.

To conclude it is worth noting that Ohio prides itself on this concept of local decision making and placing curriculum decisions in the hands of local school boards. School boards consult with the school professionals with expertise in best practices that advance optimum learning opportunities for students. OSPA supports this concept and believes that passage of HB 322 and or HB 327 would greatly diminish this long respected construct.

Thank you again for considering our views, I would be happy to further discuss or answer questions.

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