

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 9/21/21

Name: Elijah Fenwick-Sanders

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): 322 (+327)

Specific Issue: Changes to Social Studies curricula, training, resources

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

Good afternoon, Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.

I'm testifying as a concerned citizen against HB 322. I have taught high school social studies and the humanities for 10 years, I'm a voting member on the executive board of the Ohio Council of Social Studies, and I currently teach AP US History, American Government, and BIPOC: American History, Rights and Protest. I am also a practitioner of our school's Restorative Practices room as an alternative to ISD. In the classroom and district I teach, this law simply does not make sense.

I would like to start by stating that, in ten years of teaching, it's the most satisfying, fulfilling, and wonderful career I could ever ask for. I'm a history nerd that loves to dig into stories, perspectives and interpretations of our past and bring it to life in the minds of the students in my classroom. I have dedicated much of my life to learning, collaborating and training to be the most effective teacher possible for the sake of my students and community. This has been a privilege that I cherish and hold with great honor and esteem. Which is why I am so disappointed in this bill. Not simply because of its content and how it will negatively impact my students and community, but because of how it perceives my role as a teacher.

I often tell my students that, "no matter what, don't let anyone tell you who you are. Ultimately, only you can define and control you." So I would like to address how this bill and many of its proponents box my colleagues and I into some sort of space of being 'stand and deliver' educators who indoctrinate and practice partisan politics on a daily basis, which simply is not true. In my ten years teaching in multiple schools and states, I have never witnessed anything like the classrooms or educators some of the more spirited proponents of this bill describe.

The majority of my job is often simply getting our students to put down their phones, or put their head up, or redirecting any sort of behavior that distracts them from caring and taking ownership of their education and, sometimes, the education of their classmates. Therein lies the joy of teaching the Ohio history standards in a way that my students find authentic, relevant and interesting. It is an amazing feeling and it happens all the time. That is by design. To have multiple classrooms of students examine a Supreme Court case, struggle through complex arguments and arrive at the same conclusions of the Justices, the top legal minds in our country, never ceases to inspire me. My students' intellect, wit and communication skills makes the idea of "indoctrination" laughable in my classroom. What my students look for in my lessons is authenticity built from trust, which this bill sorely lacks.

The problem with HB 322/327 is that it lacks trust in the teachers that this state has licensed, trust in the people elected on local Boards of Education, and trust in the staff/admin hired in the best interests of its students and community members. I build trust by engaging and communicating with parents. I build trust through a rapport with my students. My community, admin and students trust me to provide a high quality civics education in which they feel comfortable asking questions and pointing out my mistakes if or when they occur. Unfortunately, many proponents of this bill do not trust me, my 7 years of education in American history

(including a Masters Degree), my 10 years of teaching it, or my local school board to make the best decisions for all the students in our district. I humbly ask this committee to reject the lack of trust in dedicated, experienced educators that is demonstrated by this bill.

There is a reason we have limited government and federalism that allows locally elected school boards to set policies and hire employees and admin that best meet the needs of our community. My school should not be forced to alter decades of best practices experience, including new methodologies of inquiry-based and project-based learning, that increase the engagement and learning of our students all because the most affluent and those furthest removed from the conditions of our local communities are uncomfortable talking about racism in American history. I humbly submit that I cannot solve the culture wars that divide us, but I hope you recognize that HB 322 and 327 do not either.

A great concern I have, as one public servant to another, is if you cared about your constituents, as I do my students, you would never humor this ineffective and harmful piece of legislation that was drawn up by big DC think tanks, propagated by New York media, and drafted by other state legislatures—none of which care about the learning and wellbeing of the students in Ohio classrooms.

I do want to be clear, though, that this law would not harm or change my classroom. My lessons and courses will remain the same and these laws would not be violated in their vague obscurity. Potentially, it could limit the resources I bring into my classroom if they do not meet the vague, unjust and partisan standards written in this bill. My primary fear is that young, inexperienced teachers, like I once was, will harm their students' learning out of fear of political retribution, which is the antithesis of why we enshrined public education in Ohio government and civic virtues.

Growing up in a small, rural town along the Ohio River, I've made mistakes in classrooms where, in most instances, I am the minority. The type of training and materials this bill bans would have placed a barrier on my ability to develop myself as an educator that can teach my students in the most effective and appropriate manner. I do understand that many educators and districts have difficulty discussing ideas of equity, inclusion and diversity when they are in a homogeneous classroom. Unfortunately, this bill won't solve that problem. But underfunded districts where the Fordham Institute continually demonstrates the presence of the achievement gap will pay the price of losing free resources from private or non-profit companies while being forced to hire inexperienced, and untrained teachers that do not truly understand their students or the communities they serve (Appendix 1). I've been in this vicious cycle of problem-based teaching strategies that get nowhere with students and lead to stagnation in the learning environment. This feeling is the opposite of what I described earlier. The private markets and public partnerships can allow for diverse resources that meet the needs of eclectic communities that are ever changing across our state. I fear that heavy-handed enforcement of this bill could ban reputable organizations like the Bill of Institute, StreetLaw, Inc. or the Constitution Center because they provide teaching materials for controversial Supreme Court topics and cases.

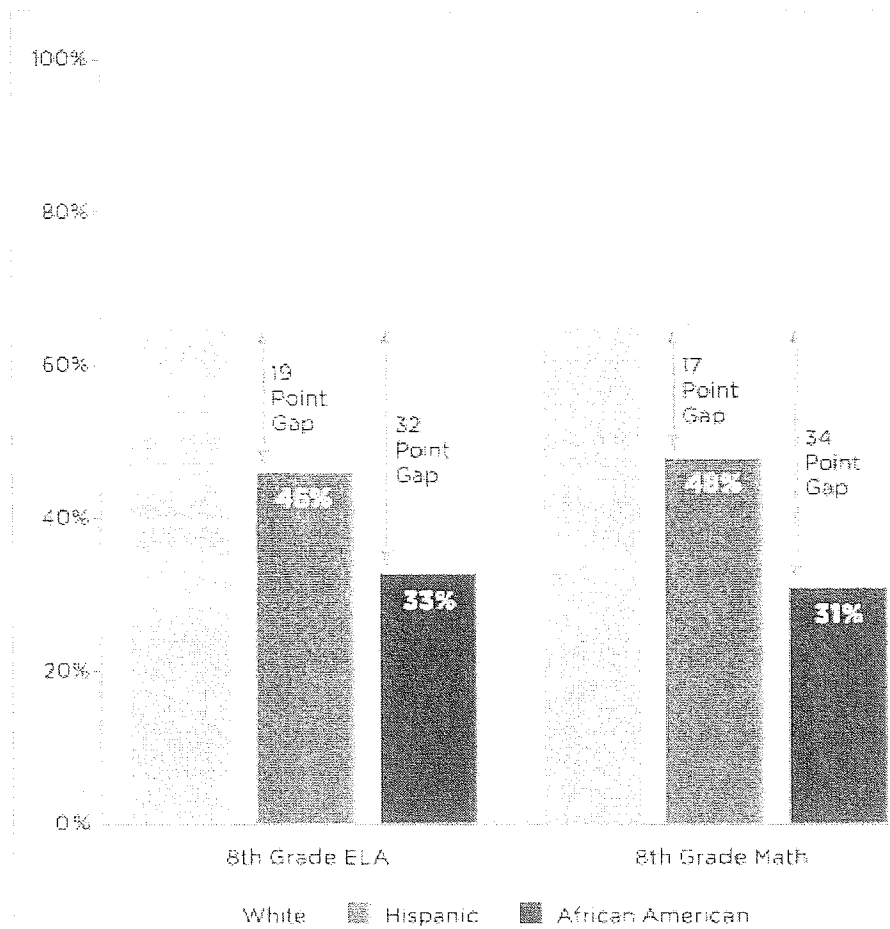
I hope you get to see how conversations change in rooms that are representative of all Ohioians. Where you will still see projections of fear and anger, the conversations become more authentic and the possibilities, rather than problems, reveal themselves as we work together on behalf of all our children. MY FEAR is that proponents of this bill want to eliminate even the possibility of those productive conversations, which would be both anti-democratic and a violation of the most basic tenets of the US and Ohio Constitution. Rather than looking for the possibility and potential of our communities by getting students together from a variety of schools (rural, urban and suburban) in their area to practice democracy and get to the root of what our communities can accomplish together, my fear is that proponent of this bill are trying to insulate themselves from the community we are all a part of and, as a result, make us more divided and all worse off.

I have 4 examples of how this bill would require the Ohio Department of Education to change it's bipartisan-developed and academically vetted standards that I'm willing to discuss more if you have questions. A brief example and explanation can be found in the appendix of my testimony. Appendix 2 offers two content statements from the Ohio Department of Education and Appendix 3 offers two learning objectives for AP US History. Simply put, the language of exclusion and prohibition of HB 322 and 327 creates unwarranted barriers in the social studies classroom that, according to the Ohio Department of Education, "aim to promote civic competence – the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life." In essence, this partisan bill will more than likely require the Ohio Department of Education to spend valuable time and resources rewriting our state curriculum from a partisan standpoint that will only benefit the most fortunate among us, while the most at-risk students will receive a less than authentic education of which they are entitled to.

Thank you for your time.

## Appendix 1

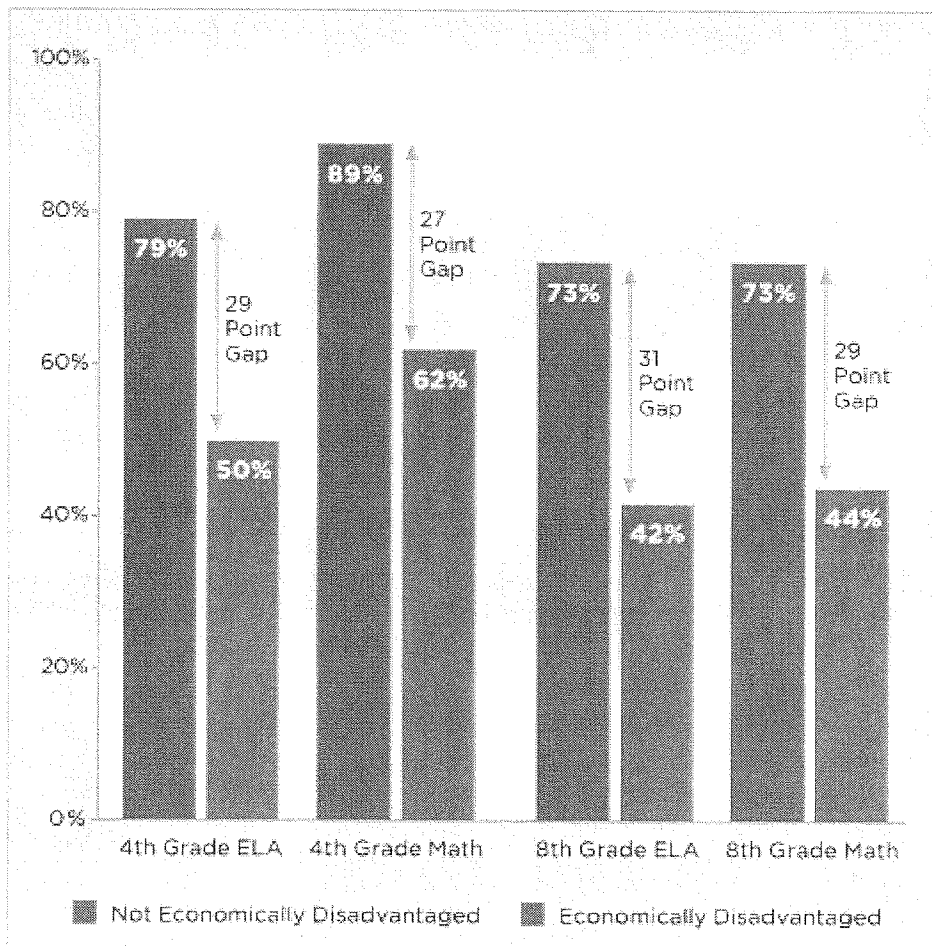
### EIGHTH GRADE: PROFICIENT OR ABOVE



**Source:** Ohio Department of Education, Advanced Reports (SY 2018-19). **Note:** Other race/ethnic subgroups are omitted for display purposes. Asian/Pacific Islander students achieve, on average, at higher levels than white students; multi-racial students achieve at levels between white and Hispanic students.

**Link:** <https://www.ohioythenumbers.com/#student-achievement-state-exams>

## FOURTH AND EIGHTH GRADE: PROFICIENT OR ABOVE



**Source:** Ohio Department of Education, Advanced Reports (5Y 2018-19). **Note:** For more on the identification of economically disadvantaged students, see section Low Income Students.

**Link:** <https://www.ohiobythenumbers.com/#student-achievement-state-exams>

### Appendix 2: American Government ODE

Content Statement 9: The Reconstruction Era prompted Amendments 13 through 15 to address the aftermath of slavery and the Civil War.

- Within the historical record is the violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan that resulted in it being declared America's 1st domestic terrorist organization, the 14th Amendment and the impeachment of a president.
- The ODE model curriculum states the following expectations of learning
  - Analyze how the Reconstruction Amendments attempted to address African American inequality through the new constitutional protections.
  - Explain the continued struggles faced by African Americans despite the passage of these amendments.
- This topic could fall into a violation of the vague "prohibited concepts" in HB 322.

- Furthermore, under the

Content Statement 17: Historically, the United States has struggled with majority rule and the extension of minority rights. As a result of this struggle, the government has increasingly extended civil rights to marginalized groups and broadened opportunities for participation.

- The ODE model curriculum states the following expectations of learning
  - Identify an issue related to the denial of civil rights to a particular minority group and explain how at least one branch of the federal government helped to extend civil rights or opportunities for participation to that group of people.
- Similar to content statement 9, unpacking this concept could lead to perceived violations of “prohibited concepts” in HB 322.

### Appendix 3: AP US History Required Course Content

#### TOPIC 7.8

## 1920s: Cultural and Political Controversies

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### Required Course Content

#### THEMATIC FOCUS

##### Migration and Settlement **MC**

Push and pull factors shape immigration to and migration within America, and the demographic change as a result of these moves shapes the migrants, society, and the environment.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

##### Unit 7: Learning Objective G

Explain the causes and effects of international and internal migration patterns over time.

#### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

##### KC-7.1.1.B

By 1920, a majority of the U.S. population lived in urban centers, which offered new economic opportunities for women, international migrants, and internal migrants.

##### KC-7.2.1.A.1.B

After World War I, nativist campaigns against some ethnic groups led to the passage of quotas that restricted immigration, particularly from southern and eastern Europe, and increased barriers to Asian immigration.

## TOPIC 8.11

# The Civil Rights Movement Expands

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### Required Course Content

#### THEMATIC FOCUS

##### Social Structures **SOCC**

Social categories, roles, and practices are created, maintained, challenged, and transformed throughout American history, shaping government policy, economic systems, culture, and the lives of citizens.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

##### Unit 8: Learning Objective L

Explain how and why various groups responded to calls for the expansion of civil rights from 1960 to 1980.

#### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

##### KC-8.2.H.B

Latino, American Indian, and Asian American movements continued to demand social and economic equality and a redress of past injustices.

##### KC-8.2.H.A

Feminist and gay and lesbian activists mobilized behind claims for legal, economic, and social equality.

##### KC-8.2.H.B.1

Feminists who participated in the counterculture of the 1960s rejected many of the social, economic, and political values of their parents' generation and advocated changes in sexual norms.

For many students, an AP class is an opportunity to get an authentic collegiate education in a classroom environment. The prohibited concepts in HB 322/327 will force school districts to remove this subject from their curriculum as they could not follow Ohio's law while upholding AP U.S. history course standards. Concept 7.8 requires the unpacking of nativist concepts as well as quotas which directly relate to perceived "valuable" and "undesired" nations and people by government officials and their constituents. Concept 8.11 drifts into categorizing movements based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. This is only two standards of the AP curriculum that could be challenged by the proponents of this bill.

The idea that this course could earn a student a college credit while it would not count toward their graduation is mind boggling and demonstrates the ineffectiveness of this bill to solve its perceived problem.