

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 9/21/21

Name: Elizabeth A. Kirby

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Cleveland Heights - University Heights City Schools

Position/Title: Superintendent

Address: 2155 Miramar Boulevard

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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): HB 322

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

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.)

Will your testimony be written, spoken, or both? Both

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Please see attached.

*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.*

## Testimony on HB 322

My name is Elizabeth Kirby and I am the Superintendent of the Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District. Our community serves approximately 5000 students from Cleveland Heights, University Heights and a small section of South Euclid. We are incredibly proud of our equity policy and were the first district in Northeast Ohio to adopt an equity policy in October of 2016. We view the diversity of our community as one of our greatest attributes and recently approved a strategic plan that has our Equity work at its core.

Like many people, I have watched the debates that have been happening across the country around education. It has been disheartening to see how communities are being torn apart due to the mere mention of diversity, equity and inclusion. This work is not only the core of our plan but also the core of the state's strategic plan, Each Child Our Future, which specifies in particular that "the path to equity begins with a deep understanding of the history of discrimination and how it has come to impact current society."

This plan and these ideals make me proud as a former teacher, former principal and current superintendent. Conversely, HB 322 represents a dangerous threat to the education of our students and ultimately the future of Ohio. Enacting HB 322 would surely undermine and eliminate much of the work around diversity, equity and inclusion that continues to gain ground in the state. The language of the bill is vague in its definition of divisive concepts and thus creates a culture of fear around crucial discussions around race, ethnicity, gender, socio economic status, and sexual identity, elements that are aligned to state standards and are critical for ensuring our students develop into well-rounded, empathetic young adults. The bill assumes the worst about our schools, educators and students, implying that there is a need to police the classroom because teachers are doing harm to our students. In addition, the bill seizes local decision making control from boards of Education to implement an instructional program linked to the needs of vision for the communicates that they represent. Under this bill, surely the work that we are doing around equity would be jeopardized due to the fear of violating a vague and capricious statute.

It is particularly strange that this bill specifically calls out the teaching of slavery, a institution in the United States that has affected people from all racial backgrounds but particularly has affected those of African-American decent. It appears as this a page from an old political playbook that seeks to race bait and drive fear and division. It is dangerous, and it is regressive.

This is one of the most challenging times in school districts as we enter year 2 of the pandemic and struggle with supporting the social emotional learning needs of our students and the academic learning loss as a result of the pandemic. Districts are already struggling with mask mandates, vaccine hesitancy, quarantine and students attendance. These bills are an unnecessary assault on the livelihood of our students and appear to be a carbon copy of legislation that is happening across the country. All of our students are impacted. It is clear that these bills are about fear, control and disinformation. Our country has wrestled with its past

and its uncomfortable truths, the way greatness has been paved with a commitment to examine and learn from our ugly past in order to build, sustain and realize a better future. This is the American way. We make mistakes, we learn, we get better. It has been a long road but I am hopeful for its future. I urge you to abandon these bills and allow the state standard and strategic plan to continue to be the guide for the work that happens in our schools as we move forward. Support all of our students in the state of Ohio rather than submitting to a carbon copy governance approach. We can do better and our students and families deserve better.