

Witness Testimony from Habeebah Grimes on House Bill 322

My name is Habeebah Grimes, and I serve as CEO of a large non-profit organization, Positive Education Program (PEP). I am also a school psychologist licensed by the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Board of Psychology, and I am a mother. Today I write to you from my perspectives gained from my personal and professional experiences, with the most critical being from my role as a mother to two Black sons.

I want my Black sons, and every student in Ohio, to grow up to be thoughtful, critical thinkers. I want them to see their experiences and cultural history honored and reflected in their school environments. As educators, we know that exposing students to evidence-based curricula, multiple perspectives, and comprehensive analyses enables them to think critically and solve problems. These educational approaches drive academic achievement and help our young people become productive citizens. Isn't that what we want for our state?

House Bills 322 and 327 threaten to undermine achievement and student success. How would the state govern adherence to these bills? Would we find ourselves in a situation where teachers feel threatened and intimidated, unable to provide important historical information? We already find ourselves in a teacher shortage, exacerbated by the struggles of teaching during the strains of a pandemic. This legislation creates an environment where teachers will find themselves regularly challenged, facing the threat that the licenses they invested time and money to earn could be taken away.

These bills will send a chill through teachers and will prevent us from developing the capacity to reconcile our history with our present to improve our future so that our nation can heal. I ask that you vote no on House Bills 322 and 327. Thank you for considering my testimony.