

Written Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322 and House Bill 327
State and Local Government Committee
Dr. Karen P. Leith, retired, Hudson, Ohio
September 22, 2021

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Representative Kelly, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Karen P. Leith. I am a social psychologist, a retired adjunct professor with 20 years of experience teaching and advising young adults. Additionally, I have 15 years of experience as a youth minister and trainer of youth ministers. I strongly oppose both HB 322 and HB 327.

As a retired educator, and from my own personal experience growing up in the 50s and 60s, I oppose these bills because...

1. Self-esteem, self-confidence and avoiding unnecessary obstacles are important in reaching dreams.

My strength was always on math, but I was discouraged from chasing my dreams in engineering because that was “no place for a woman.” Teaching was much better. I felt discrimination, being downgraded, and bullied. I had no role models since the women who did make history in math and science were left out, as we are seeing now. I was made to feel odd, different, etc. It took me years to get over the deep trauma I experienced.

I saw this again when I began teaching in Chicago right after college. My schools were named for George Washington Carver, Benjamin Banneker, and others in order to recognize Black scientists, inventors, and authors, but my Black students had no idea of this background. Black history was not in the history books or included in the full story of history, science, and literature. The change in attitude, confidence, and desire to learn definitely changed as I introduced them to their own history. We all need to see successful people who look like us.

Regardless of background, race, or zip code, every child deserves a high-quality education **grounded in honesty and facts. Everyone needs to identify with successful leaders like them. We need to stop traumatizing our youth.** Education that reflects and celebrates student identities, experiences, and cultures **maximizes engagement and achievement. Also, everyone needs to see this diversity of leaders in all fields. It fosters respect.**

2. As a member of League of Women Voters, I know how important it is to acknowledge the mistakes of the past, learn from those mistakes and more on to better relationships and a more inclusive organization that does reflect its values.

Last year, as League of Women Voters celebrated 100 years, we acknowledged leaving behind our sisters of color in order to get the vote. The dialogue about the past helped us move into our next 100 years with a new mission and new resolve not to leave anyone behind. There has been a richness to that conversation resulting in a new understanding of who we might be leaving behind now. Our commitment to diversity of all types, our looking at issues and conditions in terms of equity and our desire to be inclusive are very real.

That understanding and process means we do appreciate the need to look at our biases and consider the need to be equitable in order to be more inclusive in our membership. But, we are outward looking, working to make our democracy better. For that to happen, we need young people who understand the mistakes of the past, can think critically, and move toward a better future. There is no blaming, just an understanding of another time and place in order to not repeat those mistakes.

Dismissing racism and discrimination, or minimizing its trauma and impact, **harms individuals and communities, and prevents pathways to reconciliation and healing. It affects our ability to shape a “more perfect union.”**

3. These bills encourage dishonest education and will destroy trust when the students discover what is missing. These bills severely curtail the ability of educators, community leaders and students to fully examine our history, our art and literature, and our social constructs.

As someone who grew up in the 60s, I understand what can be learned from all our history. That is an experience I made sure my children had, sending them to a private school in order to experience some diversity which was then enhanced by their college experiences.

By confining education to one viewpoint and preventing open discourse, the bills diminish the ability of educators to help students address facts in an open environment that nourishes intellectual growth and critical thinking. Those skills are far more important than actual knowledge in becoming valued members of society. Honesty in Education is essential to Ohio's growth and viability and a high-functioning democracy.

4. These bills interfere with the autonomy and academic freedom individual instructors need to present their subject matter in a way that challenges yet supports their students. Our academic leaders must have the ability to address the needs of their students and using styles and methods that motivate and excite.

We do our students a disservice when we assume that they are not capable of thinking and analyzing what is presented. Our educators are diminished when we don't allow them to use creative methods of engaging students. There are so many times when I took an outlandish position in order to engage students in creative thinking. If all of history is not studied, students cannot fully understand where we are now. Current events need to be considered in light of the past. As someone who has facilitated foreign policy discussions for over 40 years, I see that over and over again.

Let's really equip our students for the 21st century and allow them to experience an honest education. As a retired educator, pastoral youth minister and social psychologist, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and HB 327 and vote NO on these bills.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Karen Leith