

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322
Kevin McCarthy, High School English Teacher
State and Local Government Committee
Wednesday, September 22, 2021

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kevin McCarthy and I've been teaching English in Ohio's public schools for 13 years now. I strongly oppose House Bill 322 for one, overarching reason: we are better than this bill. All of us.

Our students are better than this bill. As a teacher, what hurts me the absolute most about HB 322 is what an obnoxious insult it is to the students of this state. This bill implies that students aren't capable of viewing complex issues with an appropriately complex and nuanced lens—but *they are*. This bill suggests that students aren't capable of examining honest historical realities while still loving their country—but *they are*. This bill posits that students aren't capable of engaging in fruitful, respectful, bridge-building dialogue with their peers about controversial topics—but *they are*. Young people are capable of so much more than this bill seems to think. When I contemplate the language of this bill, my heart absolutely breaks for my students. This bill degrades them. It insults their intelligence, their complexity, their capacity for nuance and compassion. Our students are better than this bill.

Our teachers are better than this bill. The teachers of this state are an army of faithful, committed, tireless public servants who want the best for their students. We are a skilled group of professionals who understand that the classroom is an influential place—and who proceed with great care in light of that knowledge. We are compassionate thinkers and encouragers who want more than anything to teach the subjects we love to the students we care for and want to see succeed. We can model respect, compassion, empathy, and critical thinking in class discussions. We know that just because something is controversial doesn't mean it's divisive—and just because there is debate and disagreement in the classroom doesn't mean the sky is falling. We want our students to think for themselves. We teach them all the diverse options of *how* to think—not a singular version of *what* to think. We are professionals dedicated to our craft and our students. Our teachers are better than this bill.

Ohio is better than this bill. Ohio is better than this censorship that demands that our educational institutions—our centers of thought and discourse—shy away from anything complex. From anything tricky. From anything uncomfortable. Ohio is better than this outlandish government overreach that says to its public servants, its professionals, and its youth: we don't trust you. Ohio is better than that. We have a chance to send a different message: that we *trust* our teachers to teach and we *trust* our students to learn and we *trust* our parents to parent and so on. This governing body has the opportunity to be better than this bill. To send a better message than some other states. To recognize the reality that robust discourse among folks of different worldviews and different background is *not* divisive—it's constructive. The United

States was literally founded on such thinking. This country has always been better than the kind of fear-mongering this bill represents. Ohio can be too. Ohio is better than this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I implore you to say no to this bill. Say no to its cynicism. Say no—because it is *this bill* that is divisive. Not the challenging and thoughtful discussions happening in Ohio's classrooms. Hear the voices of students and teachers and parents all over the state: be better than this bill.

Respectfully submitted,
Kevin McCarthy
High School English Teacher