

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

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Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): _____

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

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

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

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Opponent Testimony for House Bill 327
George Rush, Associate Professor, Ohio State University State and Local Government
Committee
20 September 2021

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is George Rush. I am an Associate Professor of Art at The Ohio State University. I am also the parent of an eight-grade student in the Columbus City School district. As a teacher and as a parent, I strongly oppose House Bill 322 and House Bill 327.

As a as teacher, I oppose HB 322 and HB 327 because these bills appear to be a clear and present affront to academic freedom. The students I have worked with at Ohio State are extraordinary in their ability to have difficult conversations, support each other's diverse experiences, and express sympathy for those different from themselves. They have learned to be complex, intelligent, wise and empathetic because of their engagement with difficult topics, much of which has taken place in their homes, churches and clubs as well as their primary education and university studies. Some of the speech of everyday life and the classroom are explicitly those that these bills hope to somehow control. The wording in these bills explicitly abridges the freedom of speech, in direct opposition to the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. Aside from the impractical nature of controlling speech, the very endeavor these bills articulate shuts down free and open debate.

The creation of art is by its very definition a challenge to the norms and established traditions of society. Students in my classes learn how to critically reflect on their own assumptions and preconceived ideas about art and therefor learn to better understand and communicate with others. By thee own volition, race, racism, sexuality, sexual preference, and gender are just some of the topics students explore in their artwork, and the blanket prohibition of discussing, critiquing, studying or making artworks about these subjects may be prohibited under these bills. The Supreme Court has made it clear that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate". These bills threaten to limit academic freedom not only for educators but for the very students its sponsors claim to be trying to "protect". This is not the stuff of a proud liberal democracy but of the authoritarian states that we see in so many other parts of the world.

As a parent of a teenager, I want my child to have opportunities to be as enriched as the students I teach at Ohio State University. These bills threaten to keep his education from being diverse, critical, and questioning. I want my child to be confronted with complex and thorny issues. I want him to be able learn how to grasp difficult ideas and decide what he wants to do with that understanding. I do not want my son to be prevented from challenges by a paternalistic government that creates arbitrary markers for what is "divisive".

As an Associate Professor at our state's flagship university, and as a proud parent of a young Ohioan, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing House Bill 322 and House Bill 327 and vote NO on both these bills!

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed. You may reach me at grush00@hotmail.com

Respectfully submitted,

George Rush

Associate Professor

The Ohio State University