

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 327
Jennifer M. Forshey
State and Local Government Committee
September 20, 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 submit written testimony. My name is Jennifer Forshey. I am a 15-year public high school Social Studies teacher presently serving in the Rocky River City Schools. I strongly oppose HB 327.

As a Social Studies teacher I oppose these bills on many grounds but the two I would like to highlight today are the bill's opposition to teacher education and/or professional development grounded in what the bill would call "divisive concepts" and the bill's demand that permissible "divisive concepts" be taught in an impartial manner.

Over the course of my teaching experience, it is evident that students are best able to thrive and learn in communities where they feel seen and accepted. Often this manifests itself in recognizing their extracurricular activities and interests outside of the classroom. However, it also requires me to know who they are as individuals and what perspectives they bring to our classroom. The professional development I have received over the course of my career has provided insight into understanding those perspectives shaped by race, ethnicity, socio-economics, gender and sexuality. They have helped provide me with a vocabulary that ensures my students feel welcome and reinforced the importance of recognizing multiple perspectives as we learn. I think this is especially critical as we try to foster ongoing discussions or dialogues about creating and maintaining respectful pluralistic communities.

I am also very concerned about HB 327's commitment to content being presented in an "objective manner, without endorsement." In adhering to the Ohio State standards for American Government, our students dive deeply into the periods of enslavement, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movements. In our American and World History classes, we learn about the perils of genocide, including the Holocaust, as well as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and discriminatory legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act. Among these and other issues and events, there is no justification for impartiality. As my students know, the humanity of individuals -- their value as members of the human community -- is not debatable. In fact, our students learn that the Enlightenment thinkers, whose philosophies undergird our nation's founding, called all of humanity to recognize the importance of human life. Events, historical or present, that challenge those beliefs should not be viewed impartially. HB 327's call for neutral teaching of this history is shameful.

As a teacher, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 327 and vote NO on this bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit written testimony. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed. You may reach me at jforshey@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer M. Forshey