

INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY ON HB 326

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Education committee, I invite everyone to consider the throughlines of history and what happened when we influence the teaching of history.

I want to be very clear that I understand what House Bill 326 does not do. On its face, it does not alter Ohio's social studies standards or change what students are required to learn in American history or American government. The expectations remain the same. Students must continue to demonstrate **mastery** of essential concepts and skills of the eighth-grade American history course of study, outlined in the Revised Code and the Ohio Learning Standards. However, this bill leaves open a pathway for shifts in instruction to occur by introducing a new assessment that can influence how history is ultimately taught.

House Bill 326 opens the door for a shift in how American history is framed by introducing the Classic Learning Test. The CLT is rooted in a **Western, classical, and traditionally conservative** orientation. When a test leans toward a particular ideological framework, instruction often shifts to align with that framework whether intended or not. Even though the standards remain the same on paper, offering this choice of this assessment can guide teachers toward a narrower and more ideologically conservative approach to teaching American history and government.

This leads to a larger concern. The Ohio Revised Code references mastery of the social studies standards, yet we are living in a moment of intense political pressure on the teaching of American history. Across the nation including Ohio, political movements are trying to sanitize or rewrite the more complicated truths of our past. **It is contradictory to mandate that students learn from foundational documents while simultaneously elevating an assessment aligned with an ideological movement that seeks to restrict the teaching of the very history surrounding those documents. We owe our students a full and honest picture of American history that is not filtered through one ideological lens but reflects the complexity of the American story.**

I would like to question how many social studies teachers were consulted or considered in the development of this legislation & what is their lived experience in America. How many educators working daily in Ohio classrooms were asked how new assessments influence instruction. How many historians with diverse perspectives were included in the conversations that led to this bill. **We have a responsibility to make sure that the teaching of American history in Ohio reflects the full breadth of our nation's experiences.** The voices of social studies educators must be central to shaping legislation that affects their work and their students.

I also believe it is fair to ask this committee to reflect on its own level of historical literacy. The Ohio Learning Standards for Social Studies, including Grades 3,4,5,8,9, & 10, highlight or emphasize the importance of diversity & students understanding multiple perspectives, lived experiences, and the many cultures that have shaped both Ohio and the nation. These standards insist that young Ohioans learn to see the world around them through more than a single narrative. In that same spirit, **I would urge each member of this committee to consider how**

deeply and broadly you understand the American story. Not just the familiar or comfortable parts, but the perspectives of Indigenous communities, enslaved people, immigrant groups, women, laborers, and others whose experiences are essential to an honest account of our history. If we expect our teachers and students to engage in this kind of comprehensive learning, then it is important that **policymakers** do the same as you shape legislation that determines what our children will be allowed to know about the country they are inheriting. I believe it would be only fair if members of the Education Committee provided evidence of their comprehensive understanding of American History and ability to connect throughlines of history.

It is also important to address the **ideological network** connected to the CLT. The CLT's own board includes Christopher Rufo, a leading figure in the national movement to ban critical race theory in K through 12 schools, part of a broader supremacist agenda. Taking aim at Ibram X. Kendi. There are also connections with organizations such as the American Enterprise Institute, Hillsdale College, and PragerU, all of which have been active in promoting conservative education reforms, opposing DEI efforts, and supporting approaches to the teaching of American history that often minimize or omit the more complicated parts of our national story. These affiliations matter. Even the president of the United States has ties to such movements. Allowing the CLT into Ohio's assessment system opens the door for national political movements to shape how American history could be taught in ways that align with a historical pattern of backlash in moments when the country confronts uncomfortable truths.

Ultimately, this is about ensuring that our students receive a full and honest education in American history. The introduction of an assessment with strong ideological leanings risks narrowing the narrative that our students encounter. We must move beyond political rhetoric and ideology to ensure that all aspects of our nation's history are taught evenly & inclusively. This means resisting any attempt to filter our story through a single lens and instead embracing the full complexity and diversity of the American experience. Our students deserve nothing less, including my son.

In closing, I urge this committee to consider historical literacy in the same way we consider other forms of essential expertise. **We expect a doctor to understand all aspects of medical history and treatment, not only those they are most comfortable with. We expect a chef to understand a range of ingredients and how to avoid allergens for their patrons. We expect a mechanic to be competent with all cars, not only those that align with their preference. We expect firefighters to respond to any fire regardless of whose home is burning.** In the same way, our students deserve an education that equips them with a complete and honest understanding of the country they are inheriting. Ohio has an opportunity to lead with integrity by supporting the full truth of American history and ensuring that assessments do not undermine what our standards require.

There are heavy political overtones in a bill like this and I am concerned. Thank you for your time and for considering the importance of historical literacy as you make decisions that will shape the education of students across this state, and I welcome any questions.