

Testimony of Tara West
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

I graduated with a BA in English Education, an MA in literature, and will hold a PhD in Teaching and Learning this summer. I have been an educator since I graduated in 2015 and have taught at the secondary and university level throughout this time. My classes are spaces for my students to read, discuss, write, and explore literature with the intention to understand current trends in publishing. As such, we engage with literature that features a variety of perspectives different from how we might individually identify like novels with disabled, queer, and BIPOC characters. We also engage with narratives that potentially highlight cultures different from our own. To aid our understanding, we utilize theories like Dr. Rudine Sims Bishops' windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors and Toliver's addition of telescopes as we travel with the various characters. None of which teach a hierarchy of who is better or what belief is better. My students are tasked with identifying, understanding, challenging, and empathizing with the humanity in the characters they learn about. None of which is controversial. Disabled people exist. BIPOC people exist. Queer people exist. Seeking the humanity in others should never be controversial. Approving this bill feeds into fear and eugenic beliefs that will only further harm our young adults pursuing a higher education and our society at large. We've been at this crux before and we have seen the historical repercussions of intentionally denying, silencing, and erasing identities. We have to do better than our history. We have to continue to provide spaces within education that resist the erasure of diverse people, of diverse thought, of diverse ways of being. Our students deserve the right to a future that is better than what we had and approving this bill is a regression.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. I ask you to take my testimony to heart and vote NO on this bill before it harms the education of Ohioans. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to take any questions you may have.