

Jordan Ostrum
Regarding Education Committee Hearing on HB96
May 14, 2025

Dear Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, and Ranking Member Ingram,

I write to you today in opposition to Sec. 3375.47 of HB 96.

I am a proud member of the librarian profession, and a proud believer in the United States Constitution and especially the Freedom of Speech as enshrined in the First Amendment.

Sec. 3375.47 constitutes above all else an assault on Ohioans' Freedom of Speech. Ohioans of all ages have a right to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and the proposed Section robs them of that right.

Every single person, including straight and cisgender people, has a sexual orientation, a gender identity, and expresses their gender.¹ Sec. 3375.47 would eliminate access to nearly all titles in library collections for our young people. Clearly, that is not the intent of this law. No, the intent of this Section is something far more insidious: erasure of LGBTQIA+ culture.

They say those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat it. Mark Twain is often credited as saying that "history doesn't repeat itself but it does rhyme." Right now, the Ohio State legislature is joining governmental bodies around the world in ensuring our present rhymes with some of the darkest times in our past.

As a librarian, I have been educated in the history of the library as an ideal institution, a virtuous pillar of an egalitarian society. As the aphorism goes, "information is the currency of democracy." But unfortunately, wicked governments of the past have also used libraries to pursue nefarious goals in pursuit of monstrous societies.

When the United States South lived under Jim Crow racial apartheid, governments segregated public libraries.² Access to the currency of democracy was different and unequal. Because state and local governments forced librarians to violate the code of ethics of their profession, libraries became an instrument of white supremacy instead of a pillar of democracy.

In Nazi Germany, public libraries similarly became a tool of the state to pursue their vision of a racially hierarchical society.³ One of the first fascistic projects of Nazi Germany, far before the genocide of Jewish people in concentration camps, was a different form of murder: epistemicide. The murder of knowledge. For while current elected officials in the United States

¹ Understanding Gender Identities and Pronouns, Trevor Project, September 25, 2024, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/understanding-gender-identities-and-pronouns/>

² Cheryl Knott, *Not Free, Not For All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

³ Margaret F Stieg, *Public Libraries in Nazi Germany*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 2.

spread the lie that being transgender is somehow a new phenomenon, scientists in Germany nearly a century prior uncovered the truth: gender and sexual diversity is a natural part of the human condition.

Nazi officials stormed Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin and burned his research on the LGBTQIA+ population.⁴ They committed, within the first year of the Hitler regime, mass murder of knowledge surrounding a targeted minority population. And as German-Jewish writer Heinrich Heine presciently prophesied years earlier, "those who burn books will in the end burn people."⁵

Today, in state legislatures around the country, including here in Ohio, our elected officials are committing a more orderly but no less wicked form of epistemicide. As Ray Bradbury, author of *Fahrenheit 451*, once said, "You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them."⁶ That is exactly what Sec. 3375.42 seeks to do: destroy LGBTQ culture.

Support for Sec. 3375.42 constitutes support for epistemicide. I urge all members of the committee to remove Sec. 3375.42 from the budget and to continue to stand by the Constitution of the United States.

Sincerely,

Jordan Ostrum

⁴ Brandy Schillace, "The Forgotten Clinic of the World's First Trans Clinic," *Scientific American*, May 10, 2021,

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-forgotten-history-of-the-worlds-first-trans-clinic/>

⁵ "The Tale of Two Book Burnings: Heine's Warning in Context," Central European University, March 13, 2024, <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2014-03-13/tale-two-book-burnings-heines-warning-context>

⁶ Ray Bradbury, quoted in Misha Berson, "Bradbury Still Believes in Heat of 'Fahrenheit 451,'" *Seattle Times*, March 12, 1993.