

To: Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Representative Kelly, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee

From: Dr Amrita Dhar, Assistant Professor of English, The Ohio State University

Re: House Bills 322 and 327

Date: September 21, 2021

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Amrita Dhar; I am Assistant Professor of English at The Ohio State University with specialisations in Shakespeare and Milton studies, early modern and Renaissance studies, and disability studies. I am also a parent to a pre-school child.

As a parent and a professor, I oppose Ohio House Bills 322 and 327. These bills present misleading straw-man creations of “divisive concepts” in a thinly-disguised attempt at preventing actual and generative discussions about the United States’s past, present, and future. As such, the bills present a threat to academic freedom, to critical thinking, and to meaningful action towards equity, diversity, and inclusion in our complex and interlocked world.

As an Ohio State University faculty member, and as a parent to a child who will soon begin school, I join those who seek to promote a truly thoughtful, critically self-reflexive, and civically-engaged state, national, and global population. I seek your support towards our truly studying our language’s great authors, such as Shakespeare and Milton, in the fulness of their legacies and intellectual contributions—that is, I ask your assistance towards our understanding them as authors who in their time and for times to come considered the matters of race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, religion, systemic inequities, and the need for human inclusivity and compassion in our collective societies. *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, is a landmark piece of world literature precisely *because* it stages the divisions between Jews and Christians in sixteenth-century Venice as portrayed by Shakespeare. It is not a play with “divisive concepts” embedded within it, and to teach it as a means of thinking through communal tensions, reparations, and redemptive possibilities for marginalized peoples is not to “promote divisive concepts.” Please feel free to suggest to the supporters of these bills to enrol in my classes—I am happy to provide many more examples and illustrations, and my students, in turn, will challenge us all to think critically and creatively about challenging topics. Finally, I ask your help towards enabling a climate of respectful and learned exchange for our future generations.

We need critical, honest, and timely conversations about the United States’s past and present if we are to have to real future for this country. I oppose HB 322 and 327 because the proposed bills oppose academic freedom and candid conversations in our classrooms and public discourse. I seek your partnership for public and national good by opposing HB 322 and HB 327.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote **NO** on the harmful and dangerous bills 322 and 327. Thank you.