

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322

Ashlee Mason-Cleary
State and Local Government Committee
9/20/2021

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ashlee Mason-Cleary. I am a history enthusiast, genealogist, and proud Ohioan. I strongly oppose HB 322, and would like to address one portion in particular:

Sec. 3313.6028. (A) No state agency, school district, or school shall teach, instruct, or train any administrator, teacher, staff, member, or employee to adopt or believe any of the following concepts:

. . . (11) With respect to their relationship to American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality.

The unfortunate reality is that racial equality was not one of America's founding principles. This fact is abundantly clear from the language present in our founding documents and other early laws. The Declaration of Independence refers to Native Americans who defended their land from colonization as "merciless Indian savages". The first U.S. law regarding naturalized citizenship limited it to "free white persons". It was passed in 1790 during the presidency of George Washington. Racial restrictions on naturalization were not completely removed until 1954.

Ohio's first constitution, which was adopted in 1803, restricted suffrage to "white male inhabitants". In the following few years, a series of laws were passed that limited the ability of black residents to live, work, marry, travel and be educated in Ohio. One such law passed in 1807 stated: "That no black or mulatto person or persons shall hereafter be permitted to be sworn or give evidence in any court of record, or elsewhere, in this state, in any cause depending, or matter of controversy, where either party to the same is a white person."

Laws like the ones above are part of what made the struggle for racial equality so long and arduous. Generations of brave Americans, including many outstanding Ohioans, struggled to remove these overtly racist laws and make our nation even greater than the founders imagined. Passing HB 322 would conceal the true magnitude of their accomplishments and would thus be a great disservice to Ohio students.

As a proud Ohioan and history enthusiast, I ask you to consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and vote no on this bill. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed. You may reach me via email at talesofyearsago@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashlee Mason-Cleary