

Benjamin Streb

Ohio State & Local Government Committee

H.B. 322 – Opponent Testimony

9/20/21

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony. My name is Benjamin Streb and I speak as a proud lifelong Ohioan. I strongly oppose HB 322.

As a white male who has grown up with the fortune of having been a part of diverse circles and neighborhoods, I know firsthand the effects that ignorance, racism, and hatred cause. They are real, they are tangible, and they are pervasive. As a person who has had every advantage in life, from race, gender, to socio-economic standing, I recognize that this is not the case for so many in our country and communities, this is entirely un-American, and I am saddened by that reality. If our goal as a society and your goal as a government body is to truly form a more perfect union, then we must understand the realities that each of us face.

This legislation would create restrictions around learning fundamental truths about today's world that ultimately will hinder our state and our communities. Without the foundation of knowledge necessary to combat racism and gender discrimination, Ohio's children will be ill-equipped to combat issues impacted by systematic racism. Marginalized people are set up to lose in this state, with an unrepresentative statehouse that repeatedly engages in un-democratic and wrongful behavior. This is a copycat legislation, and does not represent the desires or needs of the people of Ohio. By falling into this CRT trap, Republicans are recreating the same fight that has come up over the years of American history: beginning with the justification of the enslavement and oppression of Black and Indigenous people, then Jim Crow and segregation, then some people in this very room fighting as hard as they could against integration, and now this. You are perpetuating a line of history that denies the autonomy and dignity of people of color, without whom you would not be where you are today. Furthermore, I oppose this legislation for the following reasons, on behalf of the following groups:

1. STUDENTS: This legislation holds students back from engaging with perspectives outside of their own, thus barring them from cultivating critical thought-- something that is necessary to build a successful future. The passage of this legislation also leaves Ohio

children vulnerable to real world problems, college and adult life, and understanding their own worldviews in a world that is *already discussing these subjects in accessible formats, such as on the internet.*

2. EDUCATORS: Teachers are asked to do what their degrees taught them, and more-- these are people who act as stand-in parents, nurses, therapists, and more when it comes to the care of their classrooms. During this dangerous time of COVID-19, should this legislation pass, it will create only more of a barrier for teachers in their classrooms to ready their students for the world. We believe this bill uses vague language that may lead to self-censorship of teachers who, in light of this, may be fearful of losing their jobs when approaching real history. It restricts the curricula, teaching methods, and lesson plans. This puts a tremendous burden on teachers, who are molding the minds of tomorrow's leaders and workers. Furthermore, punishing educators for teaching the true history of their diverse classrooms is forsaking their hard earned pedagogy. It is punishing teachers for teaching: a field that is already underfunded and undervalued in Ohio.
3. COMMUNITIES: this legislation centers the history of white Americans, and insistently ignores the history of people of color, who have made the country what it is. Should this legislation pass, it will cripple the needs of communities of color, ignore the pain, suffering, and *resilience* of these communities.

All children deserve an opportunity to learn the stories of their predecessors, and for non-white students, these histories are essential to understanding themselves. Erasing or muddling the true history of the US will harm all Americans. Additionally, learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion in a child's curricula is imperative for cultivating a well-rounded Ohio citizen. We know that more diversity is good for the Ohio economy, for our social relations, and for uplifting our state to the best it can be.

POC histories and stories matter. We are looking for honesty, equity, and legislation that reflects the needs of *all* Ohioans. HB 322 does not provide this. We urge you to hear our voices.

Thank you,
Benjamin Streb