

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322**  
**Courtney Cooke**  
**State and Local Government Committee**  
**9/22/2021**

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 Courtney Cooke. I am a parent and educator and I strongly oppose House Bill 322.

As a parent and educator, I oppose this bill because it actively censors and restricts evidence and truth-based education and openly infringes on academic freedoms and freedom of speech. This bill would create an unsafe and academically hindered learning environment for students, teachers, and administrators.

By prohibiting the acknowledgement and discussion of topics such as sexism and racism this bill will not only make the classroom an unsafe place for students of all genders and races but will also actively silence the lived experiences and voices of many students and teachers. The claim is that these prohibited topics are “divisive”. To me, not allowing the lived experiences of people sitting in the classroom to be heard is divisive. To not share the truth of our country’s history, how it impacts our current situations, and how it impacts our place in the world is divisive. To create a revisionist history in which we lie to our children and tell them that slavery was not an essential part of the founding of our country (despite the fact that at least 12 US presidents and more than half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence enslaved people) is divisive. To censor the freedom of speech of our students, teachers, and state personnel is divisive. To prohibit schools from participating in professional development that will support positive interaction with and support of students of all races and genders is divisive. To suggest that learners should never feel “discomfort” because they are thinking critically about their place in the world is divisive.

Critical thinking and empathy are important aspects of a well-rounded education, per state and national learning standards. This bill will not only dampen these in the classroom but will also provide punishment for their incorporation and an undue burden on teachers and administrators to restrict and police curriculum. I am deeply disturbed that this bill intends to force one version of history, one version of the country we currently live in, one version of how to think on our students. This is dangerous, discriminatory, and untruthful.

As a parent and educator, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and vote NO on this dangerous bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Courtney Cooke