

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322
Dr. Danielle A. Orozco, Educator
State and Local Government Committee
21 Tuesday 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 Dr. Danielle A. Orozco (pronouns: she / they), and I am a Chicax professor, educator, and community advocate from Los Angeles, California who now resides here in Columbus, Ohio. I am affiliated with the Ohio State University, Kenyon College, and Columbus State Community College. I strongly oppose HB 322.

As an educator, I oppose this bill because I believe that access to a diverse education where critical race theory and gender and sexuality studies is taught is absolutely integral to the fabric of our American democracy, and does a great injustice to the rich cultural histories of marginalized groups in the US including folks who identify as BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) and /or as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Young people across Ohio have a right to learn about issues related to race, gender, and sexuality studies. I, myself, identify as non-binary and queer, and am horrified to learn that the intellectual and spiritual journeys of other young and LGBTQIA+ students in Ohio may be interrupted because this bill aims to silence their educational pursuits and voices.

When you talk about eliminating topics you deem to be “controversial content related to race, sex, and current events”—topics otherwise known as critical race theory and gender and sexuality studies, you are discussing erasing not only people like me, but our stories from public record. That this law is even up for consideration is dehumanizing and incredibly dangerous because of the damaging effect that it can have on the humanities that we teach in our classrooms.

Lessons that teach students about BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ histories and cultures allow students to exercise their critical thinking skills and their empathy. Even though some of our stories are filled with tragedy, they can also be filled with hope and messages of resilience—the idea that we can overcome, and continue to learn from the triumphs and mistakes of our ancestors. A question I have is: if

this law passes, will my students be able to see me as human, if they know nothing about who I am or where I am come from?

So, who am I? I've received my education (B.A.) from the California State University of Northridge (a Hispanic-Serving-Institution that has a Chicana/o Studies department) and the Ohio State University (where I received my M.A. and PhD in English, and have worked with organizations like LASER—the Latinx Space for Enrichment and Research). With LASER, I was able to work with Latinx high school students in the Columbus-city area on how they might obtain pathways to college. Many of these students were first-generation, and were eager to gain information about what it means to have access to higher-ed. During our sessions, we didn't just talk about college; we also talked about important issues like identity, our culture, and our mental health given the rampant xenophobia that these students and their families have experienced on a daily basis.

Can you imagine what it feels like to suddenly see yourself and your people reflected in your classes and in the books that you are assigned to read, after a lifetime of erasure in public institutions? Imagery and narratives are important tools for learning, and I consider myself fortunate to be a part of learning atmospheres where critical thinking has been encouraged, and not shunned.

An agenda that does away with topics related to race, gender, and sexuality is wrong because such moves aim to censor the full experience of what it means to be human—especially about what it means to be BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ in the United States. How can our BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ students feel safe in classroom environments, knowing that their feelings, ideas, and dreams have the potential to be not only censored but silenced—indefinitely?

I am deeply disturbed when I imagine that Ohio could pass a bill like HB 322. As an Ohio professor, educator, and community advocate, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and vote NO on this bill. Please do not erase people like me, and our stories.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Danielle A. Orozco

Educator and Community Advocate