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Mission: Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community.

State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 322 and House Bill 327 Opponent Testimony
September 22, 2021

Thank you Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the State and Local Government Committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 322 and House Bill 327. My name is Dr. Dionne Blue and I am the Chief Equity Officer at Columbus City School District.

Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework, body of research, and area of academic scholarship developed by Harvard Law Scholars Dr. Derrick Bell and Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw over 40 years ago, as a way of critically examining the role and impact of race within the context of the law. Moreover, it was developed as a way to frame racism as more than just individual acts of hate, but instead as a system of laws, policies, and institutional practices that traditionally have a compounding negative impact on historically marginalized groups, particularly regarding the legal system. While it is a much more complex framework than I have time to discuss here, I can tell you much more quickly what it is not.

Critical race theory is not about Black vs. white, particularly because race itself is a social construction that is not just about Black and white people. Critical race theory is also not just about the history of race in this country, but it does provide a vehicle to understand the very real role of race as a contributing factor in the founding, building, and continuous cultivation of this country.

Most importantly, critical race theory is not a theoretical framework that is being taught in public schools in central Ohio or likely anywhere else across the country. According to a recent news story about a national poll taken of its membership this summer (2021), the National Education Association found that “more than 96 percent” of respondents said “their schools did not require them to teach critical race theory.” Critical Race Theory is a very specific school of thought that has largely been misrepresented by individuals who not only do not understand it, but prefer not to understand it, and instead would prefer to conflate it in ways that make the day to day work of educators more difficult. By doing so, this misrepresentation undermines the efforts of Columbus City School, as well as districts around the state and across the country, to provide a balanced educational experience that benefits all students, regardless of racial background.

Over the past year, in conjunction with the Columbus community, Columbus City Schools developed our Portrait of a Graduate. This portrait paints a picture of what we strive for every Columbus City Schools graduate to be: a student who is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community. The characteristics needed of this ideal graduate are: adaptability, excellent communication skills, creativity, critical thinking, global empathy and the ability to be highly functioning in a digital world. When you think of the skills needed for the future leaders of our state, country, and of our world, can you imagine such a leader without those skills? For Columbus City Schools, creating the leaders of tomorrow requires attention to

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understanding diversity, equity and inclusion as one of the ways that students develop those skills. By intentionally mischaracterizing the efforts of educators to develop the brightest minds, promote inclusivity, and create the conditions for all of our students to be successful, you are essentially crippling the efforts of our school systems to create a better future for all of our country's citizens.

Today's students are being taught to live and lead in the world around them, not just the state they are educated in, and the world around them is full of diverse experiences and people. ALL students need the tools to successfully interact with and live among all kinds of people. That is what culturally responsive education and Diversity/Equity/Inclusion does: help educators to create global citizens who will be the leaders of tomorrow. All of that is part of a rigorous, standards-based, guaranteed and viable curriculum, but none of that is critical race theory.

There is a popular saying that a rising tide lifts all boats. In actuality, for students of color (i.e., Black, LatinX, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and Multiracial), LGBTQIA+ students, migrant students, English language learners, and any other student who themselves have, or whose families may have a complicated relationship with this country, their boats are in essence tied to the dock. Therefore, when the proverbial tide rises, not only will their boats not rise, but because they are moored to the dock by lower expectations, the belief gap, disproportionality, and the school to prison pipeline, their boats are more likely to capsize, swamp, or sink. In other words, by refusing to acknowledge and address the role of race in this country, and by incorrectly aligning the need for culturally responsive practices with a theoretical framework that no lawmaker has been able to actually prove is taught in public schools, you are sentencing students of color and white students alike to a K-12 career marred by miseducation.

As the largest school district in the state, Columbus City Schools has a responsibility to educate all students. We believe in acknowledging and respecting the diversity that naturally occurs in our classrooms, in being inclusive of that diversity, and in reducing and eliminating the predictability of success or failure of any student based on their their racial, ethnic, cultural, or economic background, ability status, or any other social identity marker that might otherwise be a determining factor in their success or failure in our schools.

Unlike the ways in which critical race theory has erroneously become synonymous with culturally responsive teaching practices, scholars and practitioners of cultural responsiveness remind us that culture is something we all have, regardless of racial background, and therefore all students (not just students of color) benefit from instructional practices and materials that reflect their experiences. We are here to provide students with not just mirrors into their own experiences, but also windows into the experiences of individuals who are different from themselves. Our state's highest leaders would rather handcuff efforts to provide an education that allows mirrors for all students, not just those who have a mainstream background. HB 322 and 327 will by their nature do the very thing they are hoping to eliminate.

These house bills will force educators to misrepresent the lives and experiences of individuals with marginalized experiences of race, and will reduce our students to their race at the expense of everything else that is also true of them, while negating of all of the

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ways in which race has played a part in their lives, and in the lives of every individual within the educational context, both adult and student, Black, white, or other racialized background.

In Conclusion

At a time in our history when people of color in this country die at higher rates and younger ages than their white counterparts, as it relates to everything from COVID-19 to gun violence, there are very real issues that our legislators should be addressing, and very real problems they should be focusing on solving. Our legislators would rather chase red herrings than do the jobs that we have elected them to do, which is to protect the interests of all of their constituents, not just the well-resourced or chosen few. Critical race theory-whether in its proper form, or the contaminated form that is being voted on in these bills-is not the most pressing issue of our nation, and shame on us for spending time and taxpayer dollars on this conversation. Rather than creating a state-level one-size fits all policy, allow local districts and municipalities to implement policies and practices that fit their populations and needs, and you can get then get back to funding education at higher rates, and giving educators the respect they deserve and the tools they need to make sure all of our students are successful.

Once again, thank you Chairman Wiggam and the members of the State and Local Committee for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 322. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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