



Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 322, regarding the teaching of certain current events, race, and sex. My name is Maria Bruno, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the Public Policy Director at Equality Ohio.

Equality Ohio believes that honesty in education and a dynamic, challenging, and supportive learning environment should be core values of Ohio's public school system. HB 322 is inconsistent with these values by inhibiting a school district's ability to enforce its code of conduct policies for students and staff, and further limits school resources and opportunities for teaching about social studies and government.

HB322 removes school district's ability to control their own codes of conduct, especially when affirming and protecting LGBTQ+ students. In a time in which self harm among teens continues to grow, school districts have a responsibility to create a safe and healthy learning environment. According to the Trevor Project, LGBTQ youth who had access to spaces that affirmed their sexual orientation and gender identity reported lower rates of attempting suicide. School administrators must be able to enforce their own codes of conduct, particularly those that are founded in protecting students from self harm.

HB322 will also chill speech in the classroom by creating uncertainty surrounding what can and cannot be taught in Ohio's education system. This comes at a time when teachers and school districts are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress. A recent study found that 1 in 4 teachers are considering leaving the profession after the last year, with some teachers citing the passage of these laws as a reason.

More generally, we object to this bill because it's impossible to understand the context of modern history without an understanding of our social issues, including sex and gender. Teaching kids to have difficult, thoughtful conversations is an important part of life. It's okay and even expected to interpret certain historical events or groups that promoted hatred and violence (the KKK, the Tulsa Race Massacre, the Jewish Holocaust, etc.) were bad. Educating young people includes teaching them how to effectively convey complicated ideas and advocate for what they believe in, while also building responsible citizens. This bill would punish teachers who push their students to consider the basic moral consequences of major historical events.



HB322 would also ban service learning “in association with any organization engaged in lobbying and social policy,” as well banning any “practicum, action project, or similar activity that involves social or public policy advocacy.” This would hamper beloved and benign civic engagement projects in government classes, such as lobbying for the “state sugar cookie” or engaging students in meeting with their lawmakers to create space to learn directly from their elected officials.

All students in Ohio’s public schools system deserve a fair and honest education with the highest quality of education available. This piece of legislation does not uphold that academic standard. This bill is instead likely to result in more harm to students and fewer opportunities to learn the history and function of their own government. For those reasons, Equality Ohio asks this committee not to pass HB322.