

Opponent Testimony on HB 322
Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
September 22, 2021

Chair Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Krista L. Allison. I have been an Ohio voter my entire adult life. For over twenty years, I have worked in education at the state, district, and county positions supporting early childhood through college and career readiness (birth to grade 12). My education focus has been on non-academic supports. Non-academic supports are social, emotional, and whole child support necessary for academic and life-long success, family and community engagement, diversity, equity, inclusion, and most importantly, belonging.

I strongly oppose HB 322 because it seeks to divide us even further rather than bring us together. Not only does the bill disempower educators, but it devalues students and dishonors culture, identity, and humanity.

According to the 2018-19 Ohio Department of Education *Advanced Reports*, approximately 1.7 million public school students are enrolled across the state. They are identified by student demographic as follows:

- 41,807.4 Asian (2.5%)
- 279,264.1 Black, Non-Hispanic (16.8%)
- 101,011.6 Hispanics (6.1%)
- 2,062.5 Native American or Alaskan Native (0.1%)
- 88,849.8 Multiracial (5.4%)
- 1,477.5 Pacific Islander (0.1%)
- 1,145,881.3 White, Non-Hispanic (69%)

Regardless of race, culture, sexual identification, and zip code, we all want all of Ohio's children to be well-adjusted, healthy, resilient, and able to build successful relationships. While some of these skills are learned outside the schoolhouse walls, fundamentally, we know that schools serve two purposes, building academic and non-academic skills. Academically, educators help students build the necessary executive function skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) for life. Non-academically, they build capacity in the areas of social, emotional, health/wellness, resiliency, and relationship supports for lifelong success.

Education is a great equalizer. To prepare our children for the future and be leaders in our community, we must equip them with the necessary skills to build relationships and foster empathy. We must help them recognize the strength of the South African word "ubuntu" which means "I am because we are" and "I am because you are".

Moreover, HB 322 creates “the danger of a single story”. Writer Chimamanda Adichie, citing poet Mourid Barghouti explains, that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story...."

She further expresses that "All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single-story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not only that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

We must have the courage to help our students understand all of our country's past stories because this is us, this is our community. We must embrace diversity so that students see creativity through our differences. We must promote equity by encouraging students to use their critical thinking skills. We must provide ALL of Ohio's 1.7 million students what they need to succeed. We must teach them to value inclusion so they can effectively and authentically communicate, seeking to understand all voices. We must implore them to treasure belonging so that they know the power of collaboration for a sustainable future.

Our world is changing and growing each day. As a facilitator of conversations on equity, participants have often stated, "why didn't I learn that in school." This statement each time saddens me as I, too, have found myself asking the same question. Maybe, as members of the committee, you have asked yourself the same question.

We tell our children that they should have courage and to face adversity, to overcome their fears. How are we modeling this in HB 322? Let our legacy inspire courage over fear, unity and collective action to solve problems and empathy over sympathy. To understand that I am because you are, and we are a community.

Educator Nellie L. McClung stated that "People must know the past to understand the present, and to face the future."

I urge you to vote NO on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Krista L. Allison