

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

Lalitha Pamidigantam

YWCA Columbus

Ohio State & Local Government Committee

H.B. 322 – Opponent Testimony

Chairman Wiggman, 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 Lalitha Pamidigantam, and I am the Policy Analyst of YWCA Columbus. YWCA Columbus is a member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, a coalition of 14 sister YWs across the state. We strongly oppose House Bill 322.

YWCA is an antiracist organization focused on eliminating racism, empowering women, and fighting for peace, justice, and dignity for all. For 135 years, our YWCA has looked towards progress and broached equity anywhere we could. Today, our mission has brought us here, in front of you. Our legacy as advocates for racial and gender equity in Columbus since 1886 has put us in front of you today, with devotion to our mission and faith in progress.

It is because of this mission that we oppose HB 322. This would limit the growth that comes from learning about others' life experiences, and has nothing to do with protecting Ohio's children. Furthermore, I oppose this legislation for the following groups and reasons:

1. **STUDENTS:** This legislation holds students back from engaging with perspectives outside of their own, thus barring them from cultivating critical thought-- something that is necessary to build a successful future. YWCA strongly believes that our children deserve a strong and realistic foundation to their understanding of race and gender. The passage of this legislation also leaves Ohio children vulnerable to real world problems, college and adult life, and understanding their own worldviews in a world that is *already discussing these subjects in accessible formats, such as on the internet.*
2. **EDUCATORS:** YWCA recognizes that teachers today are expected to do more than ever. In addition to teaching, they act as stand-in parents, nurses, therapists, and more. COVID-19 has already made their jobs more difficult, and, should this bill pass, it will create only more of a barrier for teachers in their classrooms to ready their students for the world. We believe this bill uses vague language that may lead to self-censorship of teachers who may fear losing their jobs when approaching real history. It restricts the curricula, teaching methods, and lesson plans. This puts a tremendous burden on teachers, who are molding the minds of tomorrow's leaders and workers. It is punishing teachers for teaching: a field that is already underfunded and undervalued.
3. **COMMUNITIES:** this legislation centers the history of white Americans, and insistently ignores the history of people of color. The passage would cripple the needs of communities of color. According to the census, Columbus' population is rising in people of color, especially Black Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans. These communities deserve their histories reflected in their children's curricula, so our city can thrive as a multicultural area where all may succeed.

All children deserve an opportunity to learn the stories of their predecessors, and for non-white students, these histories are essential to understanding themselves. Erasing or muddling the true history of the US will harm all Americans. Additionally, learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion in a child's curricula is imperative for cultivating a well-rounded Ohio citizen. We know that more diversity is good for the Ohio economy, for our social relations, and for uplifting our state to the best it can be.

YWCA Columbus will always stand in favor of women and people of color. Our histories and stories matter. We are looking for honesty, equity, and legislation that reflects the needs of *all* Ohioans. HB 322 does not provide this. We urge you to hear our voices.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,
Lalitha Pamidigantam