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To: Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and other members of the House State and Local Government Committee

Fr: Lisa Valerian Vahey

Re: Opponent Testimony, HB 322 and sub HB 327

I am sorry that I am unable to be in Columbus on September 22 to share my testimony in person and thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony.

I strongly oppose HB 322 and HB 327. My personal opposition is rooted in my beliefs about the benefits of healthy in-class discussion and the study of history and current events:

- I want students to learn an accurate and fact-based account of American and world history, and I believe there are many examples of systemic racism (as well as individual acts of racism) that are important for students to learn about, to study, and then strive to understand, so that we can help our communities and great state of Ohio move forward in affirming ways, with integrity in how we treat others, challenge injustice and build the courage to change unfair systems.
- I believe there are also examples of individuals and groups who have worked tirelessly for justice, and we can and should study these examples.
- I believe educators and school boards deserve our trust and can work on these challenging issues within their communities; divisive topics - "hard history" - should not be taught in neutral ways, but faced in developmentally appropriate ways, aligned to our state standards and other frameworks that guide teaching and learning in Ohio.

I also want to highlight an additional reason I oppose HB 322 and HB 327 - these bills put Ohio at risk of graduating students who are not prepared for success in Ohio's workforce. Chairman Wiggam, I learned about the "Work in Wayne" initiative, and saw the list of the important employers in Wayne County. I know each House Committee member is aware of both large employers and growing sectors in your districts. Not only do we want Ohio students to graduate ready for these jobs, but we want to attract new businesses to Ohio, as well.

Well, Wayne County's "Work in Wayne" initiative did something smart - they used research to help understand what employers need. And that document, the Spherion Emerging Workforce Study, made it clear that Diversity and Inclusion is a top issue for employers, stating that "The majority of

employers agree that building a diverse and inclusive workforce is vital to their business success, yet only a small percentage are putting forth the effort they say it deserves.” What an opportunity we have in Ohio - to build graduates that are ready for success in our business - our manufacturers, our retailers and restaurants, our future teachers, nurses, and firefighters, and the staff of our global businesses, too.

Now each of you likely knows McKinsey & Company. They’ve done an incredible job researching the 21st century skills that are needed for success, detailing them in their Future of Work reports. I’m sure you’re not surprised to read that Automation and AI will create a shift in the skills needed to be successful in the workforce. But what’s after those technological and digital skills? Social and emotional skills. More important than higher cognitive skills AND basic cognitive skills. I am encouraging you to use your power to advocate to ensure Ohio students have learning experiences that help them build strong interpersonal skills like developing relationships, resolving conflict and fostering inclusiveness. Let’s build classrooms where students learn to work through challenges (like complicated and divisive topics) and emerge with employable skills, ready to bring a competitive advantage to inclusive workplaces (McKinsey has noted this, too: the business case for diversity and inclusion is strong!). Workers who have a high degree of emotional intelligence - who can work effectively with diverse teams - are the high performing employees and leaders Ohio needs - and when they graduate from our schools, ready for success - this benefits all of us!

We want Ohio’s students to thrive - to graduate from our institutions and be ready for professional success in their Ohio jobs. To do this well, the business research says they must be ready to engage in diversity, equity and inclusion work. They must be ready to have tense conversations and emerge on the other side of those conversations ready to move forward rather than afraid, shamed or paralyzed. And they need to know how to work with others who are different from them - other races, genders, languages, family structure, and other opinions and life experiences, as well. I know our schools - our students can gain these skills in our Ohio classrooms, and I respectfully request that you dig deeper into the long-term economic repercussions of HB 322 and HB 327, asking employers - in your own districts and across the state - what they need from our graduates and ensuring we look at the many ways HB 322 and HB 327 hurt Ohio students, families, communities, educators and employers.

Do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can provide additional information or you’d like to have a conversation about my testimony.

My appreciation for your service to Ohio and consideration of my written testimony.