

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322
Lou Cariello, Bexley High School Student
State and Local Government Committee
Sept 17, 2021

Representatives. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Lou Cariello. I am 17 years old, and I am a senior at Bexley High School. As a freshman, I wasn't comfortable in my own skin, let alone in my own voice.

By my sophomore year, I had joined the newly established student-led Bexley Anti-Racist Project. With the encouragement of teachers, peers, and mentors, I gained the confidence to speak and advocate for myself. This encouragement helped to develop my confidence which is why I can speak here today about House Bill 322.

This bill, if passed, would directly impact students—all students—but especially minority students. This is why I felt it was important to speak out against this bill.

By prohibiting the teaching of “divisive” issues this bill would, in effect, work against students’ understanding of the holistic history of the US, including the history of racism and discrimination. A more comprehensive history of past struggles can help us understand present-day divisions.

We want teachers to teach us about important and, *yes*, difficult and painful facts. If HB 322 were to be passed, it would prohibit teachers from presenting widely debated current events and controversial issues, as said in Section 3313.6027. (A). “ No state agency, school district, or school administration shall require a teacher of history, civics, United States government and politics, social studies, or similar subject areas who is employed by the board of education of a school district to discuss current events or widely debated and currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs.”

The Children’s Defense Fund comments on this and other sections of the bill on how limiting teachers ability to teach controversial issues or social affairs would in effect “censor and restrict how teachers can discuss racism and sexism in K-12 classrooms,” and, in so doing, “limit the professional development ... that teachers ... can receive relating to topics the bill vaguely labels as ‘divisive’.”

The Children’s Defense Fund makes an important point about how “Silencing discussions on race and racism [can] harm children ... by sending them the wrong message that these topics are taboo,” and this “silencing ... can generate feelings of isolation, discomfort, anxiety, confusion,

and disillusionment.” Students of color are particularly vulnerable to these potential negative effects that arise from the sense that their history is no longer deemed important. In effect, this bill could put the health and lives of SOC at risk by invalidating their experiences. All students have a right to learn about their history.

Students deserve a say in legislation that directly affects them. This bill would inhibit that expression. This bill would inhibit me from testifying right here, as this bill is, as most of us know, controversial and widely debated.

Thank you for listening and for the opportunity to testify.

Lou Cariello
Bexley High School Student