

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

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Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

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Will your testimony be written, spoken, or both? \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

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**Opponent Testimony on HB 322**  
**Ohio House State and Local Government Committee**  
**Sept. 21, 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 Max David Woodworth. I am a professor of Geography at The Ohio State University and live in Columbus. I strongly oppose HB 322.

As a person who has lived and worked in China for many years, I oppose this bill because it marks a very unfortunate move in the direction of state-driven thought control methods I have witnessed up close in the People's Republic of China.

Among the most pernicious things I have observed over the past twenty-five years of frequent travel to China and close engagement with people from all walks of life there is the way that everyday people bristle against, and deeply resent, the obvious ways that the government forces teachers, publishers, editors, and leaders across society to repeat official versions of China's recent history. This includes whitewashing the oppressive quasi-colonial rule in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. It also necessitates continually repeating the lie that the people of Taiwan are eager to "unite" with the PRC. Everyday people are obliged to accept stories about the fundamental goodness of the Communist Party and its leaders, and to repeat these nostrums with displays of enthusiasm. An infantilization of citizens is at the root of these approaches, and citizens correctly feel insulted by such imperious attitudes. Currently, you are debating laying out rules that prohibit the teaching of "certain current events and certain concepts regarding race and sex" (HB 322). The spirit of such language indicates a worrisome movement toward control over the space for teaching and learning that echoes what I've seen in China. In the PRC, the state determines what is controversial, enforces rules around speech, and the result is a society that is distrustful of information sources and badly misinformed on key subjects of the day. We must not allow any similar state-led effort to constrain the space for learning and teaching in Ohio. To do so would be a tremendous step backward in a diverse and complex society like our own.

Also, as a teacher at OSU, my job is to develop coursework that prepares students to thrive in our complex and dynamic society by firstly informing students on subjects in Geography, but also, and perhaps most importantly, by training

students to become better critical thinkers. Fundamental to critical thinking is the ability to judge information and arguments in accurate ways. To achieve such skills, it is imperative to engage as broad a set of ideas and concepts as possible, and to examine these from multiple angles. Diversity of thought is a strength of the American education system. Instead of forbidding certain ideas or concepts, it would be far preferable to trust our teachers at all levels to train students using a broad range of teaching methods and tools. We should also trust our young generation to engage ideas with open minds and critical eyes. In my experience, young people today are eager to be challenged through engagement with diverse modes of thought. HB 322 implies reducing the range of ideas that students might encounter during their education. This would amount to shortchanging students and underestimating the skills they develop to draw their own conclusions.

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,

Max D. Woodworth  
Associate Professor of Geography  
The Ohio State University