

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322**  
**Dr. Ryan Skinner, Associate Professor, Ohio State University**  
**State and Local Government Committee**  
**20 September 2021**

Chairman Wiggam, 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 Ryan Skinner. I am an Associate Professor of Music and African American and African Studies at the Ohio State University. I am also the parent of two k-12 students in the Columbus City Schools district. As a teacher and as a parent, I strongly oppose House Bill 322 and House Bill 327.

As a as teacher, I oppose HB 322 and HB 327 because these bills appear to be a clear and present affront to academic freedom.

In my classrooms, we routinely address challenging topics, whether historical events or current social movements. The issues can be hard, and the discussions sometimes heated, but that is as it should be. My students learn to confront difficult topics critically, carefully, and respectfully through inquisitive inquiry, evidential argument, and collegial exchange.

By explicitly “prohibiting” so-called “divisive” issues and areas of investigation, these bills risk significantly curtailing and even silencing academic study. Among other topics, the historical and contemporary study of race and racism in the United States runs the risk of blanket prohibition under these bills.

If that were to happen, the whole notion of “academic freedom” would be moot. Some issues would go un-addressed. Some topics would go un-spoken. Some histories would be veiled, obscured, or even erased.

Moreover, the definitional ambiguity of the “prohibited” and “divisive” labels risks promoting all manner of self-censorship in the classroom, as teachers choose to avoid subjects because they fear they might run afoul of the law. Do we really want to instill an ethos of fear among our Ohio teachers and their students? This is the nightmarish stuff of totalitarian states, not liberal democracies.

As a parent, I want my children to learn to thoughtfully engage—not studiously avoid—difficult, even dangerous subjects. Histories, honestly appraised, are thorny. Current events, fairly assessed, are complicated. And, yes, both can be “divisive.”

But that is where interested inquiry often begins: with a schism, a debate, a previously unconsidered position, or a first encounter with a hard truth. Such critical engagement with difficult topics should not be “prohibited,” but encouraged. That is the kind of learning environment I want for my kids, now and in the future.

And with my own children ever in mind, that is the kind of learning environment I strive to foster every day for my students at the Ohio State University.

As an Associate Professor at our state’s flagship university, and as a proud parent two young Ohioans, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony *opposing* House Bill 322 and House Bill 327 and vote NO on both these bills!

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Skinner, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Ohio State University