

Subject: Opposition to House Bill 322 – K-12 education on racism and sexism

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Shea Burden. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony to the committee. I am an Assistant Professor in Accounting at Ohio University and a member of Athens Parents for Racial Equity (AP4RE). However, the statements I am providing are not the official views of Ohio University or AP4RE but rather, my personal perspective as a loving parent of three students in the Athens City School District, a college professor that is the fourth generation of educators in her family, and a concerned citizen of the state of Ohio.

As George Washington stated, “When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.” I am submitting this statement in opposition of House Bill 322 because of its potential to have lasting and far-reaching impacts on the learning of different sides of the stories of history and current events in K-12 education in the following ways:

1. The proposed amendments in this Bill directly contradict Sec. 3301.079 (A)(1)(a)(i) (lines 19 through 23), which state that the Ohio academic standards should provide students with content and skills for success in the workplace. In a workplace multiple views, opinions and beliefs are accepted, discussed, debated, and negotiated to be able to determine solutions, avoid repeating mistakes, and to prepare agreements/contracts. This Bill has the potential to reduce skills of Ohio students in preparation for the workplace.
2. The proposed amendments include the addition of Sec. 3313.6028 (starting at line 264) which regulates state agency and school district training. In order for teachers and state workers to properly be prepared to have discussions in schools and in the workplace that promote effective learning and growth, they have to be exposed to and trained on the different perspectives that exist on history and current events. By removing the training, you are not removing the ideas of racism or sexism but rather placing educators and state workers at a disadvantage of not knowing how to handle the discussion if a student mentions the concept in class or a coworker brings it up at work.
3. The proposed amendments regulate training, which can lead to encouragement for parents to remove their children from public education because of their concerns of lacking qualifications of public educators to properly handle discussions on racism and sexism. This consequently can result in reduced funding to school districts for those students removed from the system to get private or at home education.

In closing I want to end with a quote and a reflective question for the committee. As Albert Einstein stated, “It is evident that any restriction on academic freedom acts in such a way as to hamper the dissemination of knowledge among the people and thereby impedes national judgment and action.” If these amendments were necessary in supporting academic freedom and furthering the education of K-12 students in Ohio, why are these amendments being brought forth by the State & Local Government Committee rather than the Education Committee?

Respectfully submitted,

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