

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 322
Silver Flight, Student, University of Cincinnati
State and Local Government Committee
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 Silver Flight. I am a current law and graduate student at the University of Cincinnati. I strongly oppose House Bill 322.

Education is very important to me. All students need a strong foundation in accurate history and critical thinking skills in order to become good citizens who can benefit society. As the Supreme Court has held, education “is the very foundation of good citizenship.”¹

This fall I am beginning my ninth year of higher education because I love learning and wanted to pursue a law degree to gain valuable knowledge and skills to advocate for others and make a positive impact on society. Every day when I go to class, I am reminded of how the critical thinking skills I have developed through years of interacting with controversial subjects have helped me learn to analyze everything I hear or read, rather than consuming it without questioning.

If this bill had been in effect as I was growing up, I wouldn’t have been exposed to many of the ideas that have shaped who I am as a person and that have inspired me to pursue a path of advocacy for others. Without exposure to the truth about America’s history, the good and the bad, and without discussion about the systemic nature of racism, I might believe what many white people in America still believe: that racial issues in this country are the fault of Black people, that “racism” is only when a specific white person intentionally discriminates based on race, and that racism is over because slavery is illegal. I wouldn’t be able to understand any other form of discrimination, or why Black people are disproportionately stopped by police, or why Black natural hair styles have been classified as “unprofessional.”

Pretending that race doesn’t exist, or that we don’t “see” race, because sometimes it makes us feel uncomfortable, is not the answer to making a better world, and it is not what students deserve. The truth is that people see race, whether they want to or not, and this has real-world consequences for all students. Erasing conversations about race from the classroom will not make racism go away; it will only prevent students from being able to understand how the world works and how they can make it better.

Saying that controversial topics can be addressed in an “objective” way does not help this bill. How is a teacher supposed to teach the history of slavery and racism in an “impartial” way and

¹ Brown v. Bd. of Ed. of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kan., 347 U.S. 483, 493 (1954), *supplemented sub nom.* Brown v. Bd. of Educ. of Topeka, Kan., 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

still be honest about the true history of the United States? And who gets to decide when a teacher has crossed an invisible line between “objective” and “endorsement”? This bill will only succeed in chilling all classroom speech on controversial topics, and rob students of both an accurate understanding of this country’s history and valuable opportunities to engage with controversies and current events and build their critical thinking skills.

As a law and graduate student at the University of Cincinnati, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and vote NO on this dangerous bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Silver Flight
Student
University of Cincinnati