

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Susan Haas, and I'm a resident of Licking County, in the West Muskingum School District.

When I was in law school, my Constitutional Law class read *Loving v Virginia*, the 1967 case that made it legal for people of different races to marry each other. When I read that case, I was stunned, because I'd never known that those laws didn't just apply to Black and white Americans, but to almost all interracial marriages. I phoned my half-Chinese mother. "Oh, yeah," she said matter-of-factly. "The church I wanted to get married in was in Virginia, but it wouldn't have been legal, so that's why we got married in Maryland."

I was 23 years old, and that was the first time I realized how little I knew about race and racism in the USA – how poorly my education had prepared me. My parents had tried to protect my sisters and me from the knowledge that when we were born, many Americans didn't think we should have been allowed to exist. And if I hadn't made the choice to become an attorney, we might have forever lost that bit of personal and cultural history, that to this day contributes to a rising tide of anti-Asian hate crimes.

It wasn't until my mother was in her 80s that she learned that the Chinese Exclusion Act was part of the reason her father couldn't immigrate to the United States with the rest of her family, as the Communists advanced on Shanghai. Understandably, her white German mother, a new American herself, had tried to protect her children from the knowledge that the country they'd fled to didn't want people who looked like them.

The purpose of education is to prepare students for life in society – the good, the bad and the ugly. When the whole burden of teaching history falls onto parents of color, these parents can teach only what they've either personally experienced, or received as family tradition – and white children often grow up without any understanding at all of our peers' experience. Parents of color also have to walk a line between protecting their children and being honest with them. Black parents have to go through agony deciding when to have "the talk" with their children, and explain that one misstep or discourtesy could cost their lives. In my own family of origin, with our Asian heritage, both my parents and my mother's mother erred on the side of protecting their children from knowledge, with the result that none of us really knew where we came from.

Our best hope for a peaceful and respectful society is a curriculum that teaches all children how we got where we are, so we can understand our classmates' experiences, and how they differ from our own, and make informed choices about where we go from here. Rather than boxing children into worldviews that are so limited that they seem to conflict, children need to learn all the interlocking parts of our American culture and history.

We all know the old saw about the people trying to describe an elephant by touch alone. One person touches the trunk, another the tail, another an ear, another a massive leg, and each

gives a wildly different picture of what they think an elephant is. None of them is wrong – but until they integrate their understandings into the whole, none of them is right, either.

Many of you are of an age like myself, and grew up with the truism that America is a “melting pot.” White people – and white-looking mixed-race people like me – often took that metaphor to mean complete assimilation, a culture in which nothing is left but the dominant white culture. But what is a melting pot, really? When we add ingredients to a dish, it’s not because we want them to disappear. It’s because we want to taste a flavor – even if it’s only a half a teaspoon in a pot of stew – and appreciate what it brings to the whole. “That’s the star anise,” or “that’s the foenugreek,” or “that’s the tamarind.” We should all strive to appreciate the different components of our American culture, and the earlier children learn, the more likely it is that they’ll bring this understanding into adulthood.

House Bills 322 and 327 are a step in the wrong direction for Ohio’s children, a step that closes the door to a brighter future for all of us. I urge you to oppose these bills.

Thank you.