

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony this afternoon. My name is Zachary Noesen, I am a second year student at Bowling Green State University, I am majoring in a program called PPEL, which stands for Philosophy, Politics, Economics and Law and I have aspirations to go to law school upon graduation. In addition, I am on the executive board of our Undergraduate Student Government and was a sponsor on Senate Resolution 0.3., which is A Resolution Formally Opposing Ohio House Bill 322 and Ohio House Bill 327 and Advocating for Free and Honest Education

When I was growing up, I was surrounded by a singular perspective on politics, religion, sexuality and race. Many of the adults in my life were in subtle agreement that police brutality is directly caused by “black on black” violence and I often heard racially charged statements like “if they only stopped leaving their kids, then all of their issues would be fixed” or “if they only stopped doing drugs, then the increased police presence would not be necessary in the first place!”

As a very impressionable elementary and middle school student, I found myself adopting many of these ideologies and repeating many of these phrases in and around school.

It was not until 8th grade that a teacher first challenged my ingrained belief system. Mr. Depasquale, my 8th grade social studies teacher, would often end class with questions that were open for discussion. Questions about many of the “divisive concepts” being discussed here today. These discussions, that were mandatory and were for points, were my first true introduction into a belief system entirely different from the one I was raised with.

Then again as a freshman in highschool, my English teacher facilitated a class discussion regarding traditional gender roles (for background, the discussion made sense in the context of the book we were reading). The teacher asked us to walk to one side of the room if we agreed with the discussion statement and another side of the room if we disagreed. I remember being the only person in my side of the room. At which point, we were asked to engage in a respectful and productive discussion of our two sides. It is here where I began to learn how much I loved respectful and productive discussion with folks I disagree with.

From there I began to read more into politics, religion, sexuality and race through different perspectives that were not influenced by my family or my classmates. From there I joined Model United Nations, the school newspaper, Mock Trial, and Debate Team. I even got so knowledgeable about my beliefs, and passionate about the discourse surrounding them, that

when my sociology teacher advocated for socialised healthcare in class, I took my homeroom time to write him an essay about why I disagreed.

In preparation for this testimony, I re-read that essay that I wrote to my sociology professor. And while it maybe was not the most well constructed essay, I realized that every instance in my k-12 education that “divisive concepts” were taught, was an opportunity for immense personal growth in my young academic pursuits.

And while, as with all of us, my beliefs have changed drastically since middle school, my passion for philosophy, politics, economics and law has been entirely unshakeable. I am certain that without the introduction of divisive concepts into my curriculum I would never have been able to stand here in front of you all today. An education like the one outlined in House Bill 322 and House Bill 327 would have left gaping holes in my own education, and would deprive students today of a valuable and necessary component of their own personal growth and educational development.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on House Bill 322 and House Bill 327. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.