

Date: Tuesday, September 21, 2021
TO: Members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
From: Ben Givens, Ph.D.
RE: Sub. H.B. 327: Prohibit Teaching, Advocating or Promoting Divisive Concepts

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **opponent** testimony on House Bill for House Bill 327.

I am a cognitive neuroscientist in the Department of Psychology at the Ohio State University. In my work, I know that learning requires forming new connections in our brain and modifying previous connections. Social psychology teaches us that we are *cognitive misers*, meaning that we prefer to minimize the effort required to arrive at a position or decision, by using heuristics or stereotypes so we end up thinking only superficially about a specific topic or situation. We prefer to have a simple understanding of the world rather than learn a more complex and nuanced understanding. However, to truly learn and understand, we must explore all sides of an issue, consider alternative explanations of phenomena, question assumptions, and analyze the logic of our conclusions.

The state of Ohio needs educated citizens who are thoughtful and can consider multiple points of view. Certain concepts are much more difficult to learn and accept, especially if they go against what we believe to be true. It is uncomfortable when we question our understanding of the world and consider other perspectives, but that is precisely how we learn. To the extent that new information applies to groups of people with specific identities, that information can be perceived as divisive. HB 327 aims to prevent the teaching of divisive concepts. Taking a narrow or limited view of the world leads to the tendency to seek information that confirms our existing beliefs, or what is called *confirmation bias*. This can lead to further divisions.

University faculty understand well the multiple perspectives that should be brought to bear on any given topic. They have many years of training and experience that allow them to help students see and understand alternative viewpoints. To learn and grow it is important to consider many different perspectives when analyzing history, or any other subject. Legislation to restrict the perspectives that can be discussed in the classroom infringes on the rights and responsibility of faculty to bring all reasonable ideas to the table for open classroom discussions. In terms of history, as Winston Churchill paraphrased, "those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." The only way to learn from history is to take an unvarnished look at all of factors that contribute to it. Restricting the viewpoints that are used in the analysis will lead to an incomplete understanding, and the repetition of past mistakes.