

HB322 and HB327: Opposition Testimony by Carol Beckerle (9/22/21)

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Carol Beckerle and I am currently a member of Board of Education for Columbus City Schools, although I am here in my individual capacity and am not representing the district. I am a former special education teacher in Columbus City Schools, a mother, a grandmother and a recovering attorney. I am strongly opposed to House Bills 322 and 327. I believe they are a solution in search of a problem and if they become law, would have a detrimental impact on our public education system's capacity to educate our children.

In terms of the bills themselves, I have listened to proponent testimony and community forums hosted by the Columbus Metropolitan Club, Ann Fisher and the Columbus Dispatch. Everyone, it seems, is in agreement that we should be teaching our country's history accurately and completely. Everyone also agrees that we need to teach our students to think critically. As best I can discern, the point of contention is centered around white students *being made* to feel shame or discomfort about being white. While the evidence of this seems to be anecdotal, it is very much a valid concern. No teacher should ever intentionally set out to make a student feel shame or discomfort. Period. This is and has always been true regardless what is being taught and who is doing the teaching.

To the extent this is happening in certain classrooms in Ohio, it is an instance of bad teaching practices -- not a failing of curriculum, school districts or our educational system. As such, it should be addressed through our state and local mechanisms for evaluating teachers and their instructional practices. Addressing this concern via statewide legislation that attempts to regulate what and how teachers deliver instruction is akin to prohibiting coaches from shouting instructions from the sidelines because some coaches berate their players when doing so.

The potential negative consequences of this legislation are truly concerning. Rather than encouraging teachers to deliver instruction that imparts a complete and accurate understanding of our history -- an objective on which both sides in this debate unequivocally concur -- it will have a chilling effect. Teachers will avoid teaching topics or generating lesson plans targeted at conveying an accurate and complete understanding of our history out of fear of being considered divisive.

The truth is that Ohio teachers have been teaching an accurate and complete understanding of our history for years. As a special education teacher, I have had the honor of teaching alongside language arts and social studies teachers doing so without sewing discomfort or shame. Quite the opposite. I saw our students learning to think critically and empathetically. These attributes, we all agree, are the goal for our students in today's increasingly complex and ever-changing world. Legislation that

encourages our teachers to avoid teaching current events, so-called 'divisive concepts' and an honest, accurate portrayal of our nation's history of racism will only hobble our young people as they grow into our next generation of leaders.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote no on both these bills. Thank you.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.