

Testimony on HB 322 and HB 327

House State and Local Government Committee

Scott Wiggam, Chair

Marilyn John, Vice Chair

Brigid Kelly, Ranking Member

Good afternoon,

My name is Cathi Kulik. I am a resident of Westerville, Ohio. I am a wife, mother and retired teacher from the Olentangy Local Schools. I am here today to testify in opposition to HB 322 and HB 327. I will be sharing from my experience as a teacher.

Part of the American History curriculum for fifth graders included a unit on slavery. Included in that information was an explanation of slave auctions, where auctioneers sold slaves and where children could be separated from their families. My ten-year-old students were appalled. They could not understand how people could sell people, why anyone would separate a child from his/her parent. Please note. I had no part in their immediate response to this. These children saw what they believed was wrong. I happen to believe it was wrong as well, but according to HB 327, this discussion would have to be "impartial." (lines 78-79) It would also prohibit me from providing the historical perspective of how enslaved people were viewed by their owners, because what exactly is impartial? And can I say how I agree with students who are appalled by this behavior? Apparently not, because in line 80 of this bill, it specifically dictates "impartial instruction on historical oppression." In addition, how am I to ensure that my students will not feel at fault or to blame (HB 327, lines 44-45) for this injustice, which I apparently cannot call an injustice done by others, not my students?

I read the novel, *Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis, to my class. This is a book about a young girl in Afghanistan who learned to disguise herself as a boy to support her family when her father was taken captive. Though it is a novel, it is based upon extensive research by the author that gives children insight through the lens of another child into the oppression of women in Afghanistan. The discussions were insightful, and it was so interesting to hear the children's thoughts. Though this book was published in 2001, it tells a current story, unfortunately. But what risk would I be taking by reading and discussing this book? According to HB 322 in lines 232-237, if I decide to discuss current events, I must do so from "diverse and contending perspectives." I'm all for a variety of perspectives, but that seems to be in contradiction to the spirit of HB 327, which also threatens school funding if this law is deemed to be violated. Who is going to decide, and how will it be decided, whether or not I am teaching from "diverse and contending perspectives?"

As teachers, we have many goals for our students, but at the top of my list was teaching students to think critically. Most of my career was spent with fifth and sixth graders, which, developmentally, is the perfect time to grow these skills. Learning to research, learning to evaluate resources, determining what a reliable source is, and then pulling all that you have learned together to develop your perspective...these are all things ten- and eleven-year-olds can do, and with enthusiasm! They are skills that will serve them well throughout their lives. My concern is that these bills are removing these skills from the curriculum. It appears the sponsors and co-sponsors of this bill want our kids to only think a certain way – their way.

I'm happy to take any questions.