

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of this committee - thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a strong opponent of House Bill 327, which would prohibit the teaching, advocating, or promoting of concepts which this body deems as 'divisive'.

My name is Christian Pearson and I'm a high school student from just outside of Columbus.

When I'm in a classroom or when my peers are in a classroom, we want to learn the truth. The purpose of a school is to educate, and education always involves telling the truth, regardless of whether or not that truth is hurtful. If enacted, this bill will attack that fundamental principle of truth, not by lying about our history, but by concealing our history.

Our history shapes us - for the better or for the worse, and it's important that all of Ohio's students are able to get a full understanding of that in the classroom. It's also important that the power of what is taught and what isn't taught remains in the hands of teachers throughout this state. I don't think any of you would disagree with the fact that teachers are better-suited to make decisions on behalf of their students compared to a body of partisan legislators.

That decision making would include determining what could be considered divisive and what's not. Passing this bill would allow, as I've said, politicians to determine what's convenient for students to hear and what isn't, and eventually, partisan games will trickle down into that process, as they typically do - impacting the honest education that every single student in this state cherishes.

If my history teacher were to tell his students that slavery was evil, which we can all hopefully agree on, then I would hope that he can say so without facing repercussion. If this legislation passes, however, my history teacher would then have to engage in the, quote, "impartial discussion of controversial aspects of history," as well the "impartial instruction on the historical oppression of a particular group of people based on race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, or geographic origin," per lines 78 to 82 of HB 327's text. This means that he would not be allowed to point out the true evils of our history, such as slavery or the secession of southern states. Is such a thing really a divisive issue? If we can't all agree on the fact that the enslavement of a people was a purely evil thing; if some people still take issue with that statement, then we have a lot more to worry about than just Dignity and Non-Discrimination in Education.

I've read through lots of proponent testimony in the time leading up to today, and it seems that lots of people on the other side are somehow concerned that teachers shouldn't be telling students what to think. I happen to agree with that statement, but I disagree with the notion that teachers shouldn't be giving students insight into these events of our past due to an ill-conceived notion that teachers are trying to indoctrinate students into any particular ideology. It is the job of educators to educate, and they cannot educate if they are not honest with their students. At the end of the day, truth is not indoctrination. If students can't go to school and learn, why are we going to school at all?

At the end of the day, this body is left with a simple question. Will you strip teachers of their ability to teach - or will you do the right thing and reject this legislation? For the well-being of this state, I would implore you to ignore misguided political anger by voting against HB 327.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I'll now be happy to take any questions.