

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 9/20/2021

Name: Fan Jiang

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 327

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 mins

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

I oppose House Bill 327. See attached letter.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State & Local Government Committee, my name is Fan Jiang, and I am a concerned parent of students in the Athens City School District. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 327, which seeks to ban school districts from teaching concepts regarding racism and sexism, because they are defined as divisive. HB 327 further prohibits school districts from training their teachers on those divisive concepts. In particular, it presents history from a divisive perspective and requires any history be taught “in an objective manner”.

HB327 reminds me of memory laws. Memory laws are government actions designed to guide and control public understanding of the past. Usually, they work by restricting the discussion of historical facts or interpretations by providing vague guidelines that lead to self-censorship. For example, by requesting history to be taught “in an objective manner”, it invites teachers to self-censor, so that it would not give rise to controversy, and it would not cause “discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual’s race or sex.”

But history is not about feelings. History is about facts. Facts do tend to be controversial, and sometimes shameful. The history of denying Black people the vote is shameful. The history of not allowing women to vote is shameful. The history of Chinese Exclusion Act is shameful. The history of Tulsa massacre is shameful. And the list goes on. If feelings are protected over facts, teachers feel the pressure and the easiest way for them to stay out of trouble is to avoid teaching those history so over time it becomes forgotten. Perfect maneuver for public memory.

And what are we doing to our students if we try to shield them from difficult topics and discussions that they will inevitably encounter? Are we infantilizing them by assuming we need to protect their feelings rather than let them see history for what it was and become the citizens that they might be? Racism and sexism are real issues in our society that won’t disappear just because we don’t talk about it in schools. Talking openly about conflicting but important values is just the sort of challenging exercise that any diverse but tolerant community must learn to do. And it is the job of our public schools to equip students with such essential skills needed for their future success. It is also the responsibility of our public schools to provide an honest examination of historical events of those issues, and how they have influenced and continue to shape our society. It is critical that our students, of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, receive that honest education to help them understand the historical root causes of all the racial inequities they might have witnessed in their communities as well as in the media. Teachers, on the other hand, instead of trying to figure out what is ‘divisive’ and what is not, deserve training opportunities to learn how to properly handle difficult but truthful discussions “in an objective manner”.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 327, which could lead to unintended consequences of government censorship and thus take away the academic freedom from both students and teachers that not only ultimately undermines the foundation of our democracy but also could lead to greater division and conflict.

Thank you for allowing us to testify and I’ll be happy to take any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Fan Jiang