

September 20, 2021

Chair Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Kelly NewVine, Ph.D. I am an associate professor of education at Hiram College, where I have been teaching for nine years. I teach social studies methods courses for pre-service teacher candidates. Before teaching at the college level, I taught social studies classes for students in drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation programs in Nebraska for five years. I am also a mother to two children, one who is a seventh-grade student in an Ohio public school and another who is in pre-school. With those things in mind, I am strongly opposed to House Bills 322 and 327.

The National Council for Social Studies argues that the “primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.” By excluding necessary conversations around race and diversity and prohibiting discussions of current events, which these two bills would do, we are not preparing students to make such informed decisions in a diverse society. Having discussions on “divisive” concepts is part of the education process. My job as an educator is to present students with multiple perspectives and help them develop the skills necessary to navigate sources and various perspectives so they develop their own perspective on the concept. The Ohio social studies standards mandate that students are taught to analyze sources and use evidence to support their ideas. If educators are not allowed to present a variety of sources, perspectives and ideas, we are not supporting our students in meeting the standards Ohio has for its own students. House Bills 322 and 327 would prevent educators from helping students develop information literacy, source analysis, and developing their own perspectives because they will only be shown a perspective that does not always include diverse voices.

Additionally, if these two bills are passed, the Ohio standards for social studies would need to be completely redone to change the purpose and expectations for students. One example is Ohio Standard 27. It states, “Following World War II, the United States experienced a struggle for racial and gender equality and the extension of civil rights” (ODE, pg. 34). If educators are not allowed to talk about issues of race, gender identity and issues of equity, we cannot support our students in meeting the standards as written. This puts social studies teachers between a rock and hard place. We are expected to have conversations with our students about events in history that include race, ethnicity, gender, discrimination and other potentially “divisive” topics because that is part of our history as a nation, and yet we will not be allowed to do so if these bills are passed.

We are doing the people of Ohio a disservice to not allow tough conversations to happen in classrooms. Our national framework for College, Career and Civic life standards say we are to teach students to “prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively” (NCSS, p.21). Students learn to navigate difficult and challenging topics through conflict resolution skills, which are taught in classrooms. Students are also taught how to disagree with someone using sources and evidence, which would be limited if educators are not allowed to talk about topics that could be deemed “divisive”. We want our children to grow up to be able to face challenging conversations head

on by using the skills learned in schools through the discussions in classrooms about such issues. I hope my children have conversations in their classrooms that challenge them to consider ideas in ways they had not previously thought and to not shy away from topics that may be “divisive” because someone else deemed it that way.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on these dangerous and harmful bills. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly NewVine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line for the letter 'V'.

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