

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

Lalitha Pamidigantam
YWCA Columbus
Ohio State & Local Government Committee
H.B. 327 – Opponent Testimony

Chairman Wiggman, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Representative Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam and today I am representing YWCA Columbus and am a member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, a coalition of 14 sister YWs across the state. We strongly oppose HB 327.

YWCA is an antiracist organization focused on eliminating racism, empowering women, and fighting for peace, justice, and dignity for all. Our YWCA has been in service for 135 years, and over that time, we have been an active part of protecting the rights and ensuring the success of people of color and women in Ohio. We are pioneers in the equity space, having championed issues such as integration in its early days, and we strive to live that legacy in today's fight.

A priority of YWCA is to educate and empower our communities. In service of that goal, we take on discussion around controversial but necessary elements of American society, ranging from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) services to direct services in housing and childcare. All such programs demand from us an understanding of the intersections of race, gender, and class. We echo the educational concerns discussed in our testimony on HB 322. This bill also would negatively impact the ability of students, teachers, and communities to learn from one another and grow in their understanding. In addition, this bill utilizes vague language that would impact the ability of state agencies to examine biases and integrate a variety of experiences and needs when making decisions.

This is dangerous, considering that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) face considerable health challenges in these spaces due to systematic racism. People do not have to be racist to make choices that fuel racism in institutions. People who have racial biases (even unconscious ones) cannot create unbiased systems and laws. We must allow state agencies to examine where issues exist and what the consequences of biases can mean for communities of color in order to do better.

The far-reaching impact of HB327 is as dangerous as it is divisive. Instead of fighting divisive concepts as it proclaims to do, it will reinforce systematic colorblind racism across the state. Colorblind racism, first introduced into American society in the post-Civil rights era, only reinforces de facto and systematic racism. Without taking true American history into account, we cannot right unjust events. It is important to acknowledge that despite our individual best efforts, we do not know the world from the perspective of others. This self-reflection can serve to better and improve ourselves for a better Ohio, but HB 327 would directly impact the ability of state agencies and schools to do so. For this reason, we repeat our opposition to the passage.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on HB 327. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you,
Lalitha Pamidigantam