

HB 322 & HB 327 Opponent Testimony
Lily Steiger
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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, and Ranking Member Kelly:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 322 and House Bill 327. My name is Lily Steiger, and I am a senior at the University of Rochester from Cleveland.

In my more than fifteen years of education thus far, I have not learned Critical Race Theory (CRT). On the surface, these bills restrict something that is rarely even taught at the undergraduate level, let alone in elementary schools. But in fact, what they really aim to do is use CRT as a cover for suppressing any productive discourse in the classroom about real issues of history and the present day.

HB 327 states that no student can advocate for or against a specific topic or point of view for class credit, and HB 322 states that no class on the so-called “divisive concepts” could count towards graduation requirements. With these restrictions, I would not have graduated from high school, and I believe many of you would not have either. During my senior year, I took a human rights course that was based in an organization called Facing History and Ourselves. This course challenged me and my classmates to explore and reflect on topics such as bias, prejudice, and group identities through the lenses of historical and modern events. In other words, a course that HB 322 & 327 would not recognize.

One Human Rights assignment that stands out to me was when we had to choose a topic to explore from a viewpoint opposing the one that we held. My group picked gun control as our topic, so our project consisted of us arguing that guns are necessary in our lives. Though I disagreed with what I wrote for the project, it was a valuable experience for me to try to understand opposing views.

In fact, HB 322 and 327 encourage teachers to do just that: explore the so-called “divisive concepts” from diverse and contending perspectives. Well, I challenge you all to do the same. Explore CRT from the other side, try to understand why people of all races and backgrounds are advocating against bills such as these. I can understand why CRT seems threatening. But I believe that if you spend some time out of your comfort zone listening to people who support it, you may be surprised by what you learn, just as I was while working on my pro-gun project.

The proposed bills would still allow “impartial discussions” of controversial aspects of history, such as the oppression of a group of people. I wonder, though, how teachers are expected to approach these topics impartially. By not saying that the oppressors were wrong? Many aspects of history are controversial precisely *because* they are not impartial. In other words, if something was able to be discussed truly impartially, it would not be controversial.

HB 322 and 327 also heavily restrict the teaching of many current events. In my AP US History and AP US Government classes each Friday, we would have a short quiz on the news stories of

the front page of a newspaper. The quiz was optional and for extra credit, but I remember most of my classmates participating in them and discussing the events. At the same time that I was learning about the founding of the Supreme Court in class, I was reading about a decision they had made that week. History is much more impactful and relatable when it is contextualized by the events of today, but with these bills in place, students would miss out on important conversations with each other about current events. In turn, they would not learn to develop and support their own opinions, whether or not they align with those of the person they converse with.

I mentioned earlier that my Human Rights course came from the organization Facing History and Ourselves. But what does that name mean? It means that we are all a part of history, and we have a responsibility to it. We must face history so that we can improve ourselves, and we must face ourselves so that we can improve history. When future Ohio students learn about HB 322 and 327, and the other bills like it across America, what do you want them to remember? That you, their legislators, restricted their learning, or that you understood that society can only progress through hard conversations? It's a trick question—if these bills pass, future Ohio students will not learn about them at all. They will be considered a “divisive concept” and therefore barred.

I urge you all to face history and yourselves. Vote no on HB 322 and HB 327, which are dangerous for the future of our state. Thank you for your time.