

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

I am honored to testify today and grateful for this committee's public service. My name is Nancy Patterson, and I speak to you today as a proud Ohio public servant myself of one of Ohio's great universities, and graduate of Mason High School, with a southern Baptist preacher and school board president for a father and a vocational school nurse for a mother. Their civic examples of service for the public good were compelling and have led me to my nearly 20-year career as social studies methods professor.

I also speak to you today as a past president of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS) as well as a member of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies Higher Education Special Interest Group (SIG).

OCSS and the SIG represent numerous Ohio professors and social studies teachers who are committed to the civic mission of schools as described in our standards ([Ohio Learning Standards for Social Studies](#) and the [National Council for the Social Studies C3 Framework](#)). We have grave concerns about what we predict would be chilling consequences of both Bills on professors, teachers, and students. were to become law in our state. I testify in opposition to House Bill 327, "Promoting Education Not Indoctrination Act," on behalf of the students.

HB 327 aims to prohibit the teaching of divisive topics, defined as those that assert any one of nine concepts described in Sec. 3313I.6027. C (A) (1). The fifth item on this list asserts that "Members of one nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex (Sec. 3313.6027.C (A)(1)(e). In other words, it asserts that we should acknowledge differences in our interactions with others. I strongly support this element of the Bill and believe it aligns with state and national standards. Respecting difference is a cornerstone of civil society. We social studies professors accomplish this by teaching diverse histories, with care not to present a single story. We teach our candidates to engage readily with controversial topics, and we teach them how to do so without promoting division, such that issues are presented from multiple perspectives on a given issue, steeped in source analysis, and grounded in historical frameworks.

The irony of HB 327 is that while it highlights the importance of respecting difference, it simultaneously aims to limit learning these rich and diverse historical narratives by

prohibiting certain types of classroom discussions and assignments that are deemed “divisive.” The assumption is that classroom discussion of controversial topics and assessment of student skills associated with such are somehow divisive, dangerous, and indoctrinating. Studies show that just the opposite is true. Secondary students who have experienced substantive discussion of current and historical events in their classrooms are more motivated as citizens to participate in the democratic process and more inclined to contribute to their communities. Our view is that the teaching of controversial topics can be more unifying than divisive, and that in fact, while the honest teaching of history accelerates the learning of all students, it has a disproportionate positive impact on the achievement of students of color. According to the OCSS recent [position statement in opposition to House Bills 322 and 327](#), “history education is best when youth, especially in an increasingly multicultural state and nation, see themselves and people like them, in our nation’s past.” [Learn from History](#) argues the age-old adage that “History will keep repeating unless we learn from it,” and further, that teaching dishonest history “devalues students by assuming they cannot handle complex and sometimes conflicting ideas.”

I’ll close by sharing some of my own findings from a study I did with 125 students in 20+ focus groups two years ago in our primarily rural/suburban region of the state. The prompt was for students to share suggestions they have for their social studies classes. A recurrent dominant theme was a request for more interactive teaching that included discussions about current events, specifically issues impacting their own and their families’ quality of life. We must acknowledge 1) the benefits to Ohio’s young citizenry of developing their argumentation skills and 2) that fact they just might prefer these types of classrooms and thoroughly enjoy them.

Were this Bill to pass as is, and the teaching of honest history and discussion of controversial topics to be prohibited in Ohio schools, what would remain would be an unacceptable form of indoctrination indeed.

I will now take any questions you may have.