



**Advocates for Basic
Legal Equality, Inc.**

TOLEDO OFFICE

525 Jefferson Ave.
Suite 300
Toledo, OH 43604

In Toledo:

(419) 255-0814

Toll-free:

(800) 837-0814

Fax: (419) 259-2880

TTY: (888) 545-9497

www.ablelaw.org



ABLE is funded
in part by:



**Testimony Before the House State and Local Government
Committee**

House Bill 322 and 327

September 21, 2021

Renee Murphy

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.

Chairman Wiggam, 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 Renee Murphy. I am the managing attorney for the Meaningful and Appropriate Education Practice Group at Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE). ABLE is a non-profit regional law firm that provides free legal assistance in civil matters to help individuals and groups living on low incomes in 32 counties in Western Ohio achieve self-reliance, and equal justice and economic opportunity.

As attorneys committed to equal justice and equal opportunity for all, ABLE urges you to vote against HB 322 and HB 327. All people in our great state deserve honest and comprehensive education and training opportunities. Honest education embraces complexity and nuance, and trusts teachers and students of all ages to listen, learn, debate, discuss, and engage with the marketplace of ideas. It prepares students to process, weigh, and deliberate information about current events and controversies, preparing them for informed participation in our democracy. A core tenet in our country is our right to free speech-- the free exchange of ideas, debate that enlightens, and the right to criticize our government. These bills would obstruct and suppress open, courageous educational environments.

When educators explore with their students the full, accurate history of the United States, all students see themselves represented as part of our history. They can engage in inquiry about the origins of systems in our country and worldwide, and why those systems are structured the way they are. Students can understand who those systems benefited and harmed, then and now. Most importantly, learning nuanced and complex history and learning to think critically allows and trusts students to decide how to be part of leading the efforts to a better future for themselves and their fellow citizens – striving for a future that is just for all.

Prohibiting teaching the full, rich, complex story of our country and world would harm students. Students are aware of inequalities they live with or see around them. Still, they would



not be provided with opportunities for deeper understanding and rich discussions about the history of those systems and how certain groups of people were excluded in the development of those systems. And without classrooms engaging with current events, they would not learn civics and ways to shape the future. Without that knowledge, students would feel powerless to improve their individual circumstances, community, and country. They would disengage from instruction; research shows that students are not engaged in education if they do not see the relevance to their lives. The effects of districts being prohibited from teaching the honest history of the United States would lead to widening the opportunity gap for student populations whose perspectives, identities, and experiences would be eliminated from classroom dialogue. It would discourage the development of lifelong learners capable of effectively navigating change and helping to advance society.

ABLE is committed to achieving racial equity and social justice. Laws and policies, past and present, continue to negatively impact our fellow community members of minority race, ethnic background, creed, sex, and national origin. Systemic racism was and is real. Racial inequality underlies and undermines our society and denies too many African Americans opportunities to participate fully in the economy and society. Communities of color, as a result of systemic racism, face significant barriers to access to justice. Restricting open and honest inquiry, study, and discussion of ideas will leave our citizens without the tools to engage with information and improve the future for all. HB 322 and 327 perpetuate systemic inequities by preventing the truthful examination of oppression and discrimination. Honest and accountable education that explores difficult issues and includes diverse perspectives and experiences improves educational outcomes because it strengthens relationships, builds community and civic engagement, promotes empathy and critical thinking, and prepares students to advocate for themselves.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 322 and HB 327.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Renee Murphy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Renee Murphy