

Testimony in Opposition to H.B. 322 and H.B. 327
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Ohio House State and Local Government Committee

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee, my name is Alexander Chiarelott, and I am a fourth year student at Bowling Green State University and currently serve as the President for all of our Undergraduate Students. This means that I come here not as an individual, but as the directly elected representative for over 15,000 undergraduate students. Furthermore, I serve as a member of the President's Cabinet for OSGA, the Ohio Student Government Association, an organization that is responsible for representing all college students in the state of Ohio. OSGA represents over 500,000 college students in the state of Ohio, thousands of whom are working to become future educators. We unanimously passed a resolution condemning these bills for their rhetoric and philosophies prescribed within their text. Our swift and unambiguous action on behalf of over 500,000 Ohio citizens cannot and should not be taken lightly. These college students are the future educators, future lawmakers, future parents and grandparents and the future of the great state of Ohio, they are watching with great care and attention the work done by our state representatives.

Societies do not evolve and grow from placing restrictions and limitations on the education of our youth. While some misguided lawmakers may fear that a culturally responsive pedagogy is akin to indoctrination, we must not succumb to this unfounded fear-mongering. These amendments would severely impair students' analysis of a wide variety of historical and contemporary issues from diverse perspectives and, instead, dictate that students merely consume these matters from a single, unquestioning, uncritical dominant narrative. Is this the type of citizen we want to create? One who blindly follows and obeys without question rather than one who diligently dissects our past and present to create a better, more equitable future for us all? The so-called "divisive issues" are real and tangible facets of our lives, and they significantly impact how we as Ohioans and Americans live. For reference,

We live in a nation where black and brown Americans are four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white Americans despite similar usage rates. We live in a nation where 31% of Asian-Americans have experienced an increase in racially charged remarks since the start of the coronavirus outbreak. We live in a nation where black and brown men and women are 3.23 times more likely to be killed by a police officer.

There are two types of reactions to these statistics, the first is an understanding of where we are as a society and a nation, and the second is denial.

I didn't include these statistics as a gotcha, nor are they meant as an attack on anyone in this room. I included them because I need to get across that regardless of how you reacted to these statistics, they are the undeniable truth, and the amendments with which this hearing is concerned would encourage the severe punishment of educators and school districts who dare to recognize the truth.

What is to be feared about education? Why work so hard to suppress the freedom of our educators? Why construct language designed specifically to attack the cultures and experiences of minorities? What purpose does this solve, what end goal is sought to be achieved?

I can tell you right now that attempts to block, suppress, deny, and destroy education on both the historical and contemporary treatment of minority individuals in this country will fail, and the proponents of such attempts will go down in history with the book burners, totalitarians, and bigots of bygone eras. Ironically, if the proponents of these attempts were to receive a robust education from diverse sources on the history and ongoing struggles of marginalized groups in this country, they would understand that their efforts serve only to further restrict educational opportunities for equity and cement their legacies as opponents of societal progress- yet, they remain intent on criminalizing this sort of education and, with this, severely disadvantage future generations.

But I also need you to know that it's not too late to change, it's not too late to step up and correct our course because we live in a world where it's okay to change, it's okay to grow, and it is okay to become a more educated individual.

Free, honest, and truthful education is the key to a prosperous future, a future where we can achieve a greater and more eloquent society because it starts with empathy, and empathy comes from learning that every individual is different, and has a perspective which varies from yours. We will not fear education, nor can we afford to fear each other, for only education can trounce fear.

The sweeping actions of these bills are nothing short of reckless and dangerous in the precedent they set and the actions they encourage. The totalitarian approach to the specific language of these bills is inconsistent with the values we so heavily cherish as Americans, freedom of speech, and the freedom to express your own thoughts and values.

If we spent our energy as a society working to address the fundamental problems in our society instead of working to deny and suppress them we would all be better off. Progress is an unstoppable force, the only question I have for you is how much longer until we can all accept that?