

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: September 21, 2021

Name: Dan Greenberg

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Sylvania Education Association

Position/Title: President

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 322 and HB 327

Specific Issue: _____

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Five minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

I will be providing verbal testimony.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
HB 322 and HB 327 - Opponent Testimony
Dan Greenberg – English Teacher – Sylvania Schools
September 22, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Wiggam, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Dan Greenberg, and I am a high school English teacher in Sylvania Schools in Northwest Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony on HB 322 and HB 327.

This is my 25th year of teaching, and I pride myself on teaching lessons that allow my students to analyze and discuss relevant, sometimes controversial issues. The first day of class, I go over my course syllabus, which includes the following statement about contemporary issues:

“It’s always a goal to make learning relevant, by relating lessons to things that matter to students and are important in our world. This means we will include topics that may be political in nature and/or are controversial, as we cover the standards of the English 10 curriculum. As your teacher, I am committed to presenting all sides of issues and allowing students to have thoughtful dialogue and participation. I do not and will not use the classroom as a place to push my personal beliefs.”

That statement is not just “word salad.” It means something to me. I take that statement very seriously, and I am conscious of it every day as I teach my students.

A teacher is not a preacher. It is not appropriate for me to stand in front of a group of impressionable students and indoctrinate them with certain beliefs. The job of a teacher is to present students with information, to provide them a space to reflect, to view subjects with a critical eye, and to engage in discourse with their classmates.

This is what I do, and this is what thousands of professional educators do across this state every day. We are not in the business of indoctrinating students. We are not in the business of forcing beliefs on them. We are not in the business of alienating students or their families.

The provisions in these bills serve only to scare and demoralize teachers, to diminish them as professionals. The introduction of these Bills implies that there is widespread education malpractice happening across this state; that teachers, regardless of their political leanings, are unable to separate their personal beliefs from their professional responsibilities. This is simply not accurate.

In the high school where I teach, where my daughters attend school every day, we have two Government teachers. One leans Democrat and the other leans Republican. And when my daughters take Government class their senior year, I have no reservations about them being in either teacher’s class, because both of the teachers are professionals. I know my girls will get the chance to discuss and debate issues in both classrooms, and neither teacher will push any political agendas on my children or the other children in the class.

But I can see the text in these bills potentially having an impact on the experience my daughters have in Government class, because the text of these bills, although seemingly specific, is actually incredibly vague and subject to interpretation. And if language like this becomes law, along with the stiff penalties for teachers and school districts, it will make teachers think twice about engaging students in healthy

discussion and debate. Who wants to risk it, when a first offense is an official licensure admonishment, and subsequent offenses involve suspension and revocation of one's teaching license?

I can honestly tell you that if the provisions in these Bills were to become law, I would give serious consideration to changing what I teach, not because there is anything wrong with what I am teaching or how I am teaching it, but because the stakes are too high for me and my career if a student or parent misconstrues the lessons.

For example, in American Literature, I teach The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. While my students learn about Frederick Douglass's life, we examine how the abolitionist movement grew and how Douglass's story influenced public sentiment about slavery. After finishing the novel, students complete group projects where they investigate contemporary issues where people are advocating for awareness and change. Students research topics like criminal justice reform, human trafficking, K-12 education and the minimum wage. I give students the space to research the issues using credible sources, form their own opinions and present to their classmates. I do not steer them in any particular direction in their research. And when they present, there is the opportunity for the whole class to further discuss the issues.

Truly, this legislation makes me extremely hesitant to continue with this project. Will researching contemporary issues be viewed by a student or a parent as an attempt at indoctrinating a student, which will subject me to an investigation. Even if you think, based on what I am telling you about the project, I would not be in violation of the items in either House Bill, why would I want to open myself up to a potential investigation? What kind of mental toll would that take on me or any teacher who would have to go through an investigation. It's just not worth it, and ultimately, it is students who lose out on an opportunity to expand their critical thinking skills, to engage in research on a topic that is relevant to them.

As this process moves continues, I urge you to refrain from moving forward with these Bills, which will do nothing to improve education for Ohio's children.

Thank you.