

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

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify. My name is Adam Motter. I am the Interim Executive Director and a Past President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS) and also the Director of our State Social Studies Supervisor's Network. I am the Curriculum Specialist for Social Studies and Physical Education in Akron Public Schools. Prior to that, I was a high school social studies teacher in APS and have taught US History, World History, Government, Civics, Economics/Financial Literacy, and other electives. It is a great honor to have been a social studies teacher in Akron and to continue to work with social studies teachers in Akron and across the State of Ohio. The OCSS opposes both HB 322 and 327. This testimony specifically surrounds HB 322.

I wish to acknowledge and thank you for all of your efforts as you lead Ohioans in our most important branch of Government during these unparalleled times.

It is good that we are having this public hearing and that many of you on this committee have sponsored and/or co-sponsored these bills. We should always take time to acknowledge and honor the significance of the fortitude it takes to actively participate in our democracy. We would likely all agree that we want Ohioans to follow your example and learn about challenges from multiple perspectives, analyze sources for reliability/credibility, and communicate with civil discourse and respect while developing a position that can be defended.

Coincidentally, in addition to civic rights and responsibilities, this is what social studies is really about: preparing our students to be citizens with these skills. This not my definition, it is actually the State of Ohio's definition.

*“The aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence – the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life. Although civic competence is not the only responsibility of social studies nor is it exclusive to the field, it is more central to social studies than any other subject areas in schools. Civic competence rests on a commitment to democratic values, and requires the ability to use knowledge about one’s community, nation, and world; apply inquiry processes; and employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem solving.”*

*[Source: Ohio Social Studies Standards \(Page 3\)](#)”*

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) states:

*“...The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.”*

[Source: National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: The National Council for the Social Studies](#)

Having students study “current events or widely debated and currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs” is not a “choice” as this bill states. Rather, it is the very goal of social studies led by social studies teachers who are trained in:

- historical scholarship,
- disciplinary skills such as analyzing historical sources,
- teaching controversial issues,
- understanding multiple causes and effects of events through historical, economic, social, political and geographical themes, and
- understanding the culture and needs of their community and students.

Social studies teachers are stewards of the public trust in this regard. We teach students to evaluate and make their own decisions. As such, social studies should and will continue to teach fact-based history that may connect to what the sponsor of the bill (Representative Jones) calls “points of indoctrination” stated in 322. The impact of slavery and racism in the United States are examples of this. We expect students to learn a thorough, accurate, and fact-based account of American history. We trust teachers to thoughtfully teach the hard parts of history and have systems that work in place to hold teachers accountable for this in Ohio.

House Bill 322 would specifically prohibit such a curriculum and conversation where employees “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex.” The sobering fact is there are dreadful events in our history which cannot and will not be ignored in our classrooms. Through age-appropriate teaching and learning strategies, students should absolutely understand the weight and significance of historical events that all citizens must understand.

The reality supported in this bill is that it is legal for a district to adopt a lesson that could create discomfort about events such as the Holocaust, Pearl Harbor, or 9/11, but prohibit adopting a lesson that caused discomfort due to race or sex such as a lesson about the Trail

of Tears or US slavery. However, these would be appropriate, if they don't cause the teacher "discomfort" about race or sex.

House Bill 322 3313.6027 part (B) would greatly limit student opportunities around civic engagement and civic action. This prohibition would not only decrease student opportunities, it would rule out any efforts with non-profit organizations engaged in seeking improved public policy as basic as improving the local parks or assuring trash collection. We have courses that will run afoul of 322. The AP Government Civic Engagement project guidelines and the AP Government free-response section of the exam call on students to break this law. No longer offering this course in Ohio will create an academic competitive disadvantage for Ohio students.

HB 322 also states that no agency or school district shall accept private funding for curriculum in the social studies. There are many organizations that provide legitimate curriculum solutions, including financial literacy, US Constitutional supports, geography supports, and primary source collections. Losing these resources, which have nothing to do with the original concern, will disadvantage every school's social studies program.

A primary author of the bill, Stanly Kurtz, who has written the language of this bill for multiple states, testified to this committee on June 23, 2021, that the only example for this clause is because in Illinois "private foundations with strong political leanings have taken effective control of schooling through legal provisions that invite the private funding of public-school civics classes." Not only does this not fit in Ohio education, the perceived benefit of a ban (at least in Illinois) creates tremendous harm to legitimate non-biased curriculum in social studies education. He also admits in his testimony that the "pernicious indoctrination" of "these concepts and practices have not yet come to Ohio in force."

Of the six proponent testimonies, there is not a single example of the bill's prohibitive concepts being taught in social studies education in Ohio. The only evidence Representative Jones, the sponsor of the bill, has communicated was that he had heard from parents who are upset. (August 31, Columbus Dispatch: "Columbus Conversations"). He failed to provide:

- what the challenges were
- if parents had communicated with the school regarding their challenge
- if he followed up with the school district regarding the challenge

In any legislation, it is reasonable that a citizen should examine the evidence that supports a bill or a law. Ohio students learn and practice this in social studies in multiple grades.

Conversations about race and history can sometimes be difficult, but they are an essential part of our children's education. Kids need accurate and thorough history lessons if they are to learn from the past and avoid repeating the same mistakes. As teachers, we have a responsibility to teach our kids that racism is wrong and do so in an age-appropriate way that affirms the value of all students. That is how you make progress and bring people together.

OCSS is respectfully asking that you examine our detailed position statement found at <https://ocss.org/> and vote no on both of these bills (322/327). OCSS represents almost 900 social studies teachers and other social studies professionals in Ohio. OCSS is among the strongest state social studies organizations in the entire nation. We have a collaborative relationship with state lawmakers and the Ohio Department of Education. We would be honored to collaborate with committee members or any lawmaker to support solutions to the challenges presented. We have potential and significant ideas to share that could allow for meaningful, intentional and reasonable legislative solutions to support social studies in Ohio.