

August 10th, 2021

Fellow Falcons,

The Ohio House of Representatives has introduced amendments to House Bill 322 and House Bill 327, if passed these amendments would criminalize the education of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives as well as severely diminish the ability of educators in K-12 and public universities to discuss history and current events through the perspective of marginalized peoples.

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Some of the most outrageous lines from these bills are as follows:

**HB 322:**

“(A) No state agency, school district, or school administration shall require a teacher of history, civics, United States government and politics, social studies, or similar subject areas who is employed by the board of education of a school district to discuss current events or widely debated and currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs.”

Social studies as an academic pursuit in public education has the stated aim of preparing students to become civically engaged and justice-oriented citizens within their democracy, and to prohibit schools from requiring education on current events is to effectively prohibit requiring essential civic education, to prohibit the requirement of instructing students on how to critically examine current events and proceed through the proper avenues to influence positive social change.

(B) In any course on history, civics, United States government and politics, social studies, or a similar subject area, no school district shall require, make part of such a course, or award course grading or credit for any of the following:... (3) Any practicum, action project, or similar activity that involves social or public policy advocacy.

Again, social studies aims to prepare students to effectively participate in their democracy to influence positive social change: this amendment would prohibit teachers from guiding students to participate in their democracy in an effort to make change. This language is defeating the purpose of a civic education in its entirety.

“Sec. 3313.6029. No teacher shall be required by a policy of any state agency, school district, or school administration to affirm a belief in the systemic nature of racism, or like ideas, or in the multiplicity or fluidity of gender identities, or like ideas, against the teacher's sincerely held religious or philosophical convictions.”

This section effectively prohibits requiring teachers to holistically cover issues of racism which, undeniably, exist in systemic ways, such as segregation and Jim Crow laws, discrimination in policing, hiring, lending, and housing of people of color, redlining, racial gerrymandering, and many other instances of systemic racism which still exist or which still have important effects on people living today, whether encoded in the text of a law, prescribed within it, or due to the residual effects of previous laws. Secondly, this section prohibits requiring teachers to affirm a belief in the multiplicity or fluidity of gender identities, a statement rooted in pure bigotry and transphobia. This section would give legal protection for teachers or administrators who might engage in gender-based discrimination.

### **HB 327:**

(B)(1) No state agency shall offer teaching, instruction, or training on divisive concepts to any employees, contractors, staff members, or any other individual or group or require them to adopt or believe in divisive concepts. ... (1) "Divisive concepts" means the concepts that: ... (e) 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. ... (h) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by a particular nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex to oppress another nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex.

Among many other “divisive concepts” this amendment would prohibit the teaching of anything other than colorblind theory, or the idea that we should simply ignore race and other identities that have led to individuals who possess these identities being historically and contemporarily discriminated against, rather than to teach the reality that race and other identities play an important role in individuals’ well-being and opportunities in society. This amendment would also prohibit teaching or even introducing the idea that wealthy individuals and corporations might propagate the idea of a meritocracy or

“American Dream” and encourage individuals to simply work harder to get ahead rather than addressing the systemic roots of inequality.

(C) If the superintendent of public instruction determines that any school district knowingly violates the prohibitions prescribed in division (B) of this section, the department of education shall withhold state funding from the district in the amount determined by the department until such time as the department determines the district no longer is in violation of that division.

This section threatens to withhold essential state funding from public schools for merely teaching history from various and diverse perspectives, such as the perspective of marginalized people. Withholding money from already underfunded public schools will only serve to further disadvantage students from marginalized communities who endeavor to learn their own history and correct the wrongs which they have been dealt.

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At their core these amendments seek to limit the academic freedom of our educators and restrict their ability to educate and discuss key concepts revolving around both the historic and current struggles of marginalized groups in the United States.

I have put out a call to action to the Ohio Student Government Association to coordinate rapid and effective responses to these amendments through statements/resolutions released by our individual student governments as well as engaging in lobbying efforts designed to stop the progress of these Bills.

Furthermore, I hope that each of you will join me in contacting our state representatives to let them know that HB 322 and HB 327 should not be passed.

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The full list of Ohio State Representatives and their contact information can be found on the official website for the Ohio House of Representatives: <https://ohiohouse.gov/members/directory>

Thank you,

President Chiarelott

