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OPPOSE H5739: Denying Accurate Historical Info Doesn't Erase Racism!

My name is Jocelyn Foye and I am submitting testimony on behalf of The Womxn Project as their executive director. We are a statewide 501(c)4 advocacy and direct action organization. We are focused on leveraging the power of art, advocacy, and education to advance the principles of reproductive justice, which demands that we all have the right to determine when and how we build our relationships, families, and futures and that we have the ability to live and raise our children with dignity.

We are writing in STRONG opposition to H5739, which is very similar to bills we have seen in other states that work to undermine instruction related to history and other classes in which topics around race, racism and the ways in which systems are or have been set up may cause or fuel inequity.

These bills or sponsors of these bills often talk about Critical Race Theory also known as CRT and try to distort and weaponize this concept to thwart inclusive, objective American history and equity education initiatives in schools. The truly ridiculous thing is that CRT is not new and it is a more than 40-year-old academic framework that is usually taught only at the college level.

The real issue here is that some people do not want honest conversations that examine the ways American racism has shaped public policy. They don't want kids to learn about parts of our country's history that did happen because they are not comfortable or pretty and because it forces us to look at how injustices may continue today and the role we each have to play in doing something about it.

The bill mentions, "An individual, by virtue of their race or sex, does not bear responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex." We have seen this before as an inflammatory counter to conversations around privilege or the way in which people have been treated based on how they look or who they are. It is absurd to claim as this bill attempts to do that talking about things like white privilege is a negative concept. It is ok to talk with young people about the fact that they may have certain benefits that they did not have to earn and invite them to be a part of making a more just world.

We have the chance to make our classrooms a place where we can not only acknowledge the harm that has happened in this country in how different people have been treated, but also support students in understanding and making a commitment to advance values that make our communities better. The fact is that equity and inclusion are important values that make education more effective - and accurate - by teaching the whole truth about the origins and impacts of our nation's history.

Talking about lunch counter sit-ins or suffragettes or anti-semitism does not separate or divide. Quite the opposite. It can help to build school connectedness by making it clear that difference or diversity is a good thing to be celebrated and respected and not persecuted. It also ensures that history or government or health - or any classes - do not erase the experiences or contributions of a group of people.

All young people deserve to see themselves reflected in school curricula. Research shows that a person's identities are strongly linked to their health outcomes. We can't, and shouldn't, ignore the challenges youth of color face in their lives. It is dishonest, inaccurate and frankly disrespectful to folks who have come before us who deserve to have their stories and experiences shared and understood as part of our history and how we got here.

Censoring our country's history does not set up students to lead their healthiest and most fulfilling lives because censorship limits their world view. The sad fact is that opposition to honest education is nothing new. There has always been a vocal minority intent on stopping equity-centered education that could lead to positive social change.

The recent misrepresentation and weaponization of CRT shouldn't threaten the years-long intentional efforts public schools have been making to teach core concepts of equity, justice, and kindness — efforts that predate these recent misleading attacks on equity initiatives in schools.

Further, this isn't just about making sure that we do not erase injustices of the past, though that is very important, but also about creating more comprehensive curricula that reflects the leadership and contributions of a wider array of leaders, inventors and innovators. It is not only white men of privilege who built this country and it is critical that students understand that and that people who have not always been included in stories of the American dream get to see themselves, too.

Compromising young people's education by censoring and distorting our country's history or eliminating sex education sets up our young people for failure, instead of success. It also interferes with the ability to teach young people how to think critically, which is essential to their health and well-being. This bill does not respect

our state's commitment to freedom and equity. It does not expect the important role of education to help our kids to learn and to do better than we have done in the past - to learn how to think and to consider how they treat themselves and others. Please, vote no on H5739.

We do not need to copy harmful, regressive legislation from other states or undermine our schools as they work hard to support and empower students to learn, to think, and to thrive as healthy, informed members of our communities who are able. We can learn from our past and do better as individuals and a society in the future.

Making sure we have real conversations about the ways that people have been treated differently or harmed due to their race, immigration status, class or that they live in poverty, their sexuality or gender are part of helping prepare students to thrive in our increasingly diverse society. Being real about the past helps us to create a better and more just future and that benefits us all. Thank you.

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