



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ohio Statewide Coalition & Violence Preventionists Collectively Oppose House Bill 616

In early April, House Bill 616, also known as Ohio's "Don't Say Gay" bill, was introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives by Representative Mike Loychik (R-Bazetta) and Representative Jean Schmidt (R-Loveland). Ohio's version of the bill seeks to combine the Curriculum Ban Bill (HB 322, HB 327) with the Don't Say Gay Bill (Florida's HB 1557) in a strategic effort to restrict anti-racist, inclusive education for young people under the guise of limiting the teaching of "divisive concepts," including gender identity, sexual orientation, and the history of racism in the United States.

As anti-violence practitioners and experts and violence prevention educators, we know that all oppression—and all oppressive tactics—are connected. Anti-violence education and skill building cannot be fostered in an unsafe environment. When schools and educators are facing threats to their licensure and funding over abstract legislation that can deem any topic "divisive," lessons will be steeped in fear and anxiety rather than exploration and co-creation. It is not possible to feel safe in a learning environment when teachers are forced to lie to students or risk losing their license. In the Ohio Department of Education's own *Each Child, Our Future* strategic plan, the department acknowledges that Ohio's student body is more diverse than ever and that effective educators and safe learning environments are key to closing achievement gaps.

With this increased educational surveillance, established community partnerships with sexual violence prevention programs will be strained, as funding is put in jeopardy based on what can be taught in the classroom. Without sustainable, comprehensive, and specific primary prevention efforts, **Ohio will see an increased prevalence of sexual violence and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ students will effectively be erased from all discussions on health, safety, and well-being.**

Anti-violence education cannot co-exist in these proposed learning environments because anti-violence education IS anti-oppression education. Anti-violence education requires Ohio's preventionists to support learning environments where all students are safe, and are treated with dignity and respect. Safety, dignity, and respect begin with building social-emotional skills, such as empathy and positive self-concept, based in an understanding and consideration of people's whole selves. To limit education to a heteronormative, whitewashed version of the world means that preventionists cannot support younger generations in building skills to end violence in Ohio. **Violence of all types thrives in unsafe environments; safety thrives in honest, equitable environments.**

In addition to requiring safe and effective learning environments, there must be safe whole-school environments for the well-being of Ohio's students. In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, "Fifty-four percent (54%) of those who were out or perceived as transgender in K-12 were verbally harassed,

nearly one-quarter (24%) were physically attacked, and 13% were sexually assaulted in K–12 because of being transgender.”¹ And according to recent research, LGBTQ-inclusive curricula² and cultural socialization³ (which includes discussions on cultural history and values from peers or caregivers) were critical for positive school experiences, a greater sense of belonging, and increased support from school staff. **If LGBTQ and BIPOC students are to succeed in school, it is crucial that cultural socialization and contextualization are included in school culture and curricula to counteract targeted discrimination of systems-impacted students.**

Make no mistake: An attempt to silence inclusive, honest education is, in fact, divisive. A push to remove history and identities from education does not make those truths disappear; it only increases the opportunity to further perpetuate harm against BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students being systematically erased by this proposed legislation.

HB 616 does not seek to eradicate racist and divisive concepts. **It seeks to surveil and limit honest conversations that foster a safe, dignified, and respectful learning environment for young people. It seeks to diminish critical thinking and empathy; it seeks to tell false narratives about the lived experiences of so many in Ohio.** LGBTQ people are not divisive concepts. Racism is not a divisive concept. The subversion of these realities is divisive.

Ohio’s sexual violence preventionists oppose HB 616, as does the coalition that supports them, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence. **Refusing to recognize this country’s history of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressive roots does not make it disappear; it only makes it harder to ensure the safety of students who are most historically and presently impacted by this refusal, thereby inhibiting our ability to end all forms of violence.**

We call on Ohio to:

- Listen to our youth and their unique experiences,
- Robustly invest in primary prevention efforts founded in medically accurate, developmentally appropriate information,
- Embrace inclusive, honest education that fosters safer environments for all Ohioan students and all Ohioan survivors of sexual violence.

Resources & Action Requests from Allied Organizations:

- [PPAO reel](#)
- [PPAO slides infographic](#)
- [Equality Ohio We Say post](#)

¹ See Sandy E. James, Jody L. Herman, Susan Rankin, Mara Keisling, Lisa Mottet, and Ma'ayan Anafi, *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Executive Summary*, <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary-Dec17.pdf>

² See GLSEN, *The 2019 National School Climate Survey Executive Summary*, https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/NSCS-2019-Executive-Summary-English_1.pdf

³ See Juan Del Toro, Ming-Te Wang, *Longitudinal inter-relations between school cultural socialization and school engagement: The mediating role of school climate*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959475221000414>

Signed (supporters will continue to be added to this list):

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
Erin Ostling Burkholder
Kathryn Farmer
Katlin Shuherk
Eliza Sabo
Townhall II
YWCA Dayton
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Cleveland Rape Crisis Center
Rebecca Hunsicker
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice at the University of Cincinnati College of Law
Corina Klies
HelpLine
Journey Center for Safety and Healing
Rachel Smith
Dani A Robbins, Non Profit Evolution
National Council of Jewish Women/Cleveland
YWCA of Northwest Ohio
Advocating Opportunity

*To be added to this list, supporting this statement of opposition, please email Caitlin Burke, OAESV Director of Prevention & Public Health, at cburke@oaesv.org.

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Interviews available upon request.

As Ohio's statewide coalition, OAESV uses an anti-oppression lens to advocate for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and to empower communities to prevent sexual violence.