



Tennessee General Assembly
Senate Democratic Caucus

Monday, May 17, 21

The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee
State Capitol, First Floor
Nashville, TN 37243

Governor Lee,

We, members of the Senate Democratic Caucus, are writing today to urge that you veto Senate Bill 623.

This misguided piece of legislation, which has been characterized as a ban on diversity lessons known as “critical race theory,” will cause our state harm and aggravate problems that already exist in public education.

First and foremost, this legislation is littered with overly broad and vague prohibitions that experts and educators say will have a chilling effect on lessons meant to explore and expose the consequences of racism in American history.

Reckoning with the history of slavery, white supremacy, Jim Crow, and racism is essential not only to fully educate our students, but also for our future. Confronting racism and building a better future requires citizens who are equipped to have hard discussions about race. This misguided law will rob many in the rising generation of the tools necessary to challenge broken systems that produce and perpetuate racial disparities.

We cannot reconcile the promise of our principles and the reality of racism in our history if we do not talk about it. Our children deserve to learn the full story—the true story of the victories, the struggles, and the failings—so they can be prepared to contribute to a future for our nation, where liberty and justice are a reality for all of us.

Another chief concern: this legislation could create more problems for school districts that are already struggling to recruit and retain high-quality, licensed teachers and especially educators of color.

Roughly one out of three public school teachers in Tennessee are retirement eligible and, due to a mix of factors, finding replacements for these educators has been a challenge that falls almost exclusively on local school districts.

We fear this law will further damage Tennessee's reputation in education, making our state less desirable for career-oriented teachers and educators.

Lastly, this law was rushed through the legislature in the final moments of session without once being considered by the Senate Education Committee. If legitimate concerns exist, Tennesseans deserve open deliberation from state lawmakers, not the last-minute rush we saw in the General Assembly.

Governor, we appreciate the time and effort your office has dedicated to reconciling our nation's history with racism. Your work to send the bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest from a place of honor in the capitol to the state museum is noteworthy and commendable.

Last July, you said: "I've continuously said that we should learn from our history, rather than whitewash it. More recently, I've said that the most appropriate resolution for the Forrest bust is to put it in the appropriate context. I am as committed to those beliefs today as I have ever been."

This bill will *whitewash* American history lessons by diminishing classroom discussions about race and the origins of racial disparities.

Let's not erase our progress. Governor, please veto Senate Bill 623.

Sincerely,



Brenda Gilmore
Senator
District 19



Heidi Campbell
Senator
District 20



Jeff Yarbro
Senator
District 21



Raumesh Akbari
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District 29



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