Legislation Text

File #: 210697, **Version:** 0

Denouncing attacks on efforts to address systemic racism in the United States and urging the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to reject House Bill 1532, which aims to prohibit instruction on the history of racial oppression and the examination of how racism functions in our law, policy, and society.

WHEREAS, Calls to address widespread racial inequalities in the United States have become more prominent in recent years with the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and mass protests that took place in the summer of 2020 following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery; and

WHEREAS, Initiatives such as the 1619 Project, a collection of longform journalism and associated curriculum, have highlighted present day racial inequities in areas such as public health and education, the criminal justice system, and housing, while identifying the roots of these disparities in the founding of our nation and its laws and policies by examining issues from redlining practices during the New Deal to the war on drugs and mandatory minimum sentences; and

WHEREAS, These efforts to reexamine the history and founding of our country sparked a widespread backlash from conservative lawmakers seeking to suppress dialogue and exploration of concepts such as structural racism, white privilege and white supremacy, intersectionality, implicit bias, race and gender-based oppression, and Critical Race Theory (CRT); and

WHEREAS, CRT is an analytic framework that was developed by legal scholars as an extension of Critical Legal Studies in the 1970s in response to hindered civil rights legislation. Critical race theorists hold that race is a social construct; that our nation's history of racism is embedded in our systems and institutions and continues to impact outcomes for Black Americans and other people of color; and that the lived experiences of people of color should be elevated and inform law, policy, and scholarship; and

WHEREAS, In September 2020, the Trump administration issued an executive order on "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping", which effectively banned activities or trainings related to systemic racism and implicit bias across federal agencies, contractors, and grant recipients. Though President Biden rescinded the order immediately after taking office, it had a chilling effect on anti-racist and anti-sexist efforts, with numerous cancellations and alterations of planned conversations, trainings, and other events designed to educate people about systemic oppression and structural racism; and

WHEREAS, Over 27 states, including Pennsylvania, have introduced bills or taken actions this year to restrict the teaching of CRT or limit conversations on racism and sexism. Some states, such as Tennessee, have passed laws prohibiting instruction of topics related to racial equity with penalties of up to $10 million for school districts found in violation of the law; and

WHEREAS, Representatives Russ Diamond and Barb Gleim, the sponsors of House Bill 1532, have stated that the legislation aims to curtail the "divisive nature" of concepts such as CRT; however, the bill's language prohibits the teaching of the ideas unrelated to and unsupported by CRT, for example the idea that any race or sex is superior to any other; and

WHEREAS, The mischaracterization of CRT and vague nature of the bill's proposed ban on teaching "racist and sexist concepts", which includes banning discussion of the ideas that the United States or Commonwealth are fundamentally racist, will have a chilling effect on anti-racist education and activities, as has occurred in other states passing similar legislation; and

WHEREAS, The impacts of legislation banning CRT on teachers is already being felt. Matt Hawn, a teacher in Tennessee, was fired in August shortly after the state passed its anti-CRT bill, for assigning readings such as Ta-Nehisi Coates' article, "The First White President". In addition to facing potential employment consequences, teachers have expressed concerns about the bills misleading parents and making it harder for them to teach culturally relevant curriculum; and

WHEREAS, Learning about topics such as implicit bias and systemic racism is crucial in developing welcoming school environments for all students. With increased reports of hate crimes and racist incidents in schools in recent years, teachers must be empowered to create safe spaces to facilitate conversations about racism and bias; and

WHEREAS, Racial disparities in education abound in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Compared to their white peers, Black students in Pennsylvania are more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, to be arrested in schools, and to attend school in older buildings with potentially hazardous conditions. These inequities are not natural occurrences, but are shaped by laws and appropriations related to school funding as well as policies such as schools' codes of conduct. Prohibiting discussion of historic and present day systemic racism denies the lived experiences of Philadelphia's students; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia was the first major city to require a full credit course on African American history as a requirement for high school graduation. Our schools must continue to embrace the fundamental civic responsibility to teach the truth to all students, which includes an accurate history of race and racism in the Commonwealth and our nation, and how that history shapes our institutions, so that we can collectively pursue racial justice in our communities and beyond; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Denounces attacks on efforts to address systemic racism in the United States and urges the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to reject House Bill 1532, which aims to prohibit instruction on the history of racial oppression and the examination of how racism functions in our law, policy, and society.
Co-sponsors (6): Derek Green (At-Large), Kendra Brooks (At-Large), Gilmore Richardson (At-Large), Jamie Gauthier (District 3), Cindy Bass (District 8), Isaiah Thomas (At-Large).