

Georgia Coalition Against Classroom Censorship Statement Opposing House Bill 888, House Bill 1084, Senate Bill 375 & Senate Bill 377

We, the undersigned members of the Coalition Against Classroom Censorship, condemn the effort to silence our students and educators through House Bill 888, House Bill 1084, Senate Bill 375, and Senate Bill 377. Our education leaders should create laws, policies, and practices that promote diverse, equitable, inclusive, and culturally-sustaining school environments, and these bills do the opposite.

These bills claim to promote and protect intellectual freedom. They do the opposite by silencing educators, mandating the adoption of inaccurate concepts and points of view, prohibiting truthful classroom conversations, and punishing those schools that allow students and educators to engage critically with the impact of systemic racism and marginalization in this country.

These bills claim to seek to avoid situations where students feel discomfort, guilt, or distress on account of that student's race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin. However, these bills send the clear message that Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other marginalized students are unworthy of protection from the discomfort and distress they will inevitably feel from the prohibition of discussing their experiences and their history.

These bills threaten much-needed school resources as they allow as much as 20% of a school district's state funding to be taken from districts that are believed to have violated provisions of these bills. Not only will this penalty compromise the quality of education in Georgia's already underfunded schools, but it will disproportionately impact students of color who are more likely to attend underfunded schools and whose education programs and instructional practices may be challenged by the surveillance these bills encourage.

These bills seek to "sanitize" and whitewash U.S. history by requiring impartial and politically nonpartisan presentations of the truth. Proponents' preferred revisionist version of history denies and downplays historical and current racial injustices, and it undermines the past and present experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other marginalized students. There is no utility, pedagogical purpose, or kindness in keeping young people in the dark about this country's history or the injustices they can plainly observe today.

Furthermore, with these bills in place, students will not learn the content knowledge they need to critically analyze our society or learn how to act as empathetic leaders, advocates, and allies in our democracy. It would leave Georgia's young people behind their peers in other states who will be more prepared for colleges and careers that expect students to be prepared to think critically.

Finally, these bills will have an intimidating effect on educators and students across the state. Other states have already seen multiple instances of teachers and administrators being placed on leave, students feeling fearful of classroom conversations, and valued programs being canceled due to the chilling effect of similar legislation. The additional burden of adhering to vague, restrictive, ahistorical, and at times contradictory learning standards is unfair to our teachers and students, especially as they continue to face challenges related to the pandemic.

We believe that punishing children, schools, and families for political points is wrong. The sponsors of this bill fail to imagine a Georgia that values all of our children and schools. The

sponsors of this bill fail to imagine a Georgia that supports schools in teaching all of our history – the good and the bad – so that students are prepared with knowledge of the mistakes of our past and equipped to build a better future. Their failure of imagination is their loss.

We will be relentless in calling their legislation what it is: a cruel political move to use taxpayer dollars as a weapon to wield against teaching the truth. This bill will be directly harmful to Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other marginalized students who already experience racism, marginalization, and systemic oppression. For these reasons, we oppose this bill and ask all individuals who care about students to do the same.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia

Deep Center

Georgia Youth Justice Coalition

Intercultural Development Research Association

Public Education Matters Georgia

Southern Education Foundation

SPLC Action Fund