ATLANTA — More than a handful of proposed Republican-led education bills in Georgia — including measures to ban the teaching of critical race theory — could be damaging to teachers and schools, say leading Democrat leaders around the state.

A virtual forum sponsored by Democrat Reps. Karen Bennett, Rhonda Taylor and Donna McLeod on Thursday highlighted several bills in the chambers that they say seek to censor what history is taught in school, what materials are available in books and libraries, and gives parents the option to choose what their child learns.

As with many states, Republicans are looking to ban the teaching of critical race theory, a concept that suggests systemic racism is embedded in laws, policies and institutions that lead to racial inequalities.

While CRT isn’t taught in Georgia schools, HB 888 and 1084 seek to punish schools where teachers appear to be discussing the concept, which opponents argue could borderline other race-related topics.

“What the Republican Party is attempting to do is to change history and deny a good education to our students,” said Georgia Rep. Doreen Carter of the House Education Committee during the Thursday forum. “This bill is talking about how some people may feel if we teach the truth. Both of these bills are talking about how we’re going to teach history, especially how it teaches American U.S. history as it relates to how they have treated Blacks and Black and brown people in the U.S.”

The bills propose taking away funding from schools for teaching certain race-related topics.

HB 1084 mandates that schools establish a complaint policy for addressing violations. Students, parents, school personnel or a district attorney would be able to bring a complaint. And appeals could be made all the way to the state board of education level. In the case of a violation, for example, the state school board can suspend state waivers which benefit a local school system.

HB 888 would allow the state school board to withhold 20% of the state-contributed Quality Basic Education Program funds allotted to the local school system or public elementary or secondary school.
“And what is interesting about this bill is that the language says ‘... what is deemed inappropriate.’ So there seems to be somebody monitoring what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, and that's subjective,” Rep. McLeod said.

“There’s no real definition of what constitutes a threat that will call for money to be taken away from the school system,” Rep. Karen Bennett added.

Though not limited to these items, specifics of HB 888 prohibit specific teaching of concepts that include:

– “That individuals of any race, ethnicity, religion, color or national origin are inherently superior or inferior;

– That individuals should be adversely or advantageously treated on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, color or national origin;

– That individuals, by virtue of their race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin bear collective guilt and are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, ethnicity, religion, color or national origin;

– That governing systems or programs which were designed to identify, select or promote participants on the basis of merit or work ethic are discriminatory or were created by members of a particular race, ethnicity, religion, color or national origin;

– That any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual’s race, ethnicity, religion, color or national origin;

– That an individual’s moral character is necessarily determined by the individual’s race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin; and

– That the United States is a systemically racist country.”

Georgia Association of Educators President Lisa Morgan, who is also a kindergarten teacher, gave an example of how the bills could put a strain on teachers' uncertainty to teach certain topics.

During Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday month in January, Morgan teaches her students about King’s civil rights efforts leading up to his assassination. Her students often ask a series of questions about the assassination, which she said could be complicated to answer if either bill passes.

"Why did he shoot Dr. King? How I can answer that question in an objective manner and without endorsement, because my endorsement is to condemn him. He was a racist. I tell my kindergarteners, he was a bad man because that’s their level of understanding,” she said.

A section of HB 1084 prohibits curriculum that addresses the topics of slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation or racial discrimination “in an objective manner and without endorsement.”

“How can you love your Georgia teachers and believe that we do not have the integrity and the professionalism to teach the Georgia Standards of Excellence as we are required to do,” Morgan said.

A USA Today/Spots poll conducted Aug. 30 through Sept. 1, 2021, revealed that 63% of parents surveyed supported the teaching of the ongoing effects of slavery and racism.

Another bill in the General Assembly, SB 226, the "Quality Basic Education Act," would require each local board of education to adopt a policy providing for a complaint process to address complaints submitted by parents or guardians alleging that material, including library books, that is harmful to minors has been provided or is currently available to a student.

In addition, a bill dubbed “Parental Bill of Rights” gives parents the right to request instructional material from the school principal or superintendent within an established review period, and would require putting procedures in place for a parent to withdraw a child from that portion of the class.

**TRENDING VIDEO**