

Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding House Bill 88.

My name is Ellen Wittman and I am a student at Miami University. Today I am here to testify on behalf of all students nationwide, who believe in and support the first amendment right to free speech on campus, and on behalf of all those who believe in preserving college campuses as marketplaces of ideas.

As a student leader at Miami University, I have personally had my freedom of speech attacked by my administration. Last year, my Students for Life group and I sought to put up a pro-life display on the main public quad of campus. We had hosted this display several times in the past, without any pushback from administrators.

However, this time, we were told that we could *only* host our display if we posted trigger warning signs at all entrances on and off campus. I was told that my display was emotionally offensive and polarizing to the campus community, and because of this, the administration conditioned my speech. These administrators were attempting to shield certain individuals from something they did not want to see, *at the expense of my first amendment rights*.

Ultimately, my fellow students and I did not put up or display, as these extra conditions shut down our speech. At this point, I reached out to Alliance Defending Freedom, and with their help, filed a federal lawsuit against Miami University. But there really is no reason I should have had to file a lawsuit, because the only permit we need to speak freely and unconditionally on campus is the First Amendment. Speech is not free when university officials put conditions on student speech.

Unfortunately, the administrators at Miami University are not the only ones hostile to conservative speech on campus. As I mentioned, we have hosted this display in the past, and *every single time* we have done so, our display has been destroyed and vandalized by our fellow students. We continually find parts of our display in trash cans or scattered across campus.

Sadly, my testimony is only one example of dozens of free speech violations that occur across the country every year. Vandalism, unconstitutional speech policies, and hostility toward the First Amendment on campuses must be put to an end. And I am here today to ask you to take a stand for the free speech rights of students across our state.

Just last week I stood alongside President Trump as he signed an executive order instructing public universities nationwide to respect the First Amendment right to free speech on campus or run the risk of losing federal funding. The President shared my story with the audience and I was given the opportunity to speak on my case as well. This was an incredible event and truly historic as the President has recognized and taken action on this free speech issue on the federal level. I am now encouraging you to do the same for Ohio.

As a student, as a constitutionalist, and as an individual who has fought for free speech on campus, I urge the passage of House Bill 88, so that my fellow students and I can all speak freely on campus, and continue to pursue our education through the free and open exchange of ideas.

Thank you.