

Testimony Against HB 88
By Sarah Charlton

My name is Sarah Charlton, and I am a third year student majoring in History at the Ohio State University. I consider myself to be from a moderate to conservative family, and I am a native of Newark, Ohio. I come before you today to express the issues I hold with House Bill 88, colloquially referred to as the Forming Open and Robust University Minds Act.

I would like to begin with stating for the record that I do not take issue with the notion that this bill articulates a protection of free speech. I believe that college campuses are a place where free speech should be protected and nurtured in order to ensure that vast identities and ideas are represented. However, I take strong issue with the fact that this legislation requires public universities to bear the burden of funding security for speakers who have the potential to bring a negative presence to our campuses.

I am lucky enough that my parents pay \$4,920.40 each semester out of my college fund to allow me to work toward my degree. I am confident that the \$39,363.20 that my parents will spend on tuition for my degree is spent on paying the faculty members that I look to as mentors, funding the state of the art technology we have on campus, and opening doors for students who otherwise could not afford to be Buckeyes too.

However, Section 3345.0212; Subsection B of this bill could change all of that. This subsection states, “No state institution of higher education shall charge security fees to a student or a student group based on the content of their expression, the content of the expression of their invited guest, or the anticipated reaction to an invited guest’s expression.”

In October of 2017, the University of Florida estimated it would cost about \$500,000 to fund security when white nationalist Richard Spencer was set to speak on their campus. Similarly, University of California at Berkeley spent \$600,000 on security during a visit from Ben Shapiro, a conservative author. In a tweet, Shapiro complained of the audacity of the University to charge him a \$15,000 security fee¹. The University was forced to absorb the remaining \$585,000, which Shapiro ignored.

One might think that perhaps these costs are unnecessary or wasteful, but in January of 2017, a student at the University of Washington was shot in the abdomen during a protest against conservative speaker Milo Yiannopolous’s speech on campus. Like the University of Florida, and Berkley, the University of Washington had taken the necessary precaution in security for this event, but the 950 hours of overtime logged by local law enforcement didn’t prove enough to prevent this tragedy.

Finally, I would like to note that at the same time this bill forces public universities to bear the financial burden of giving security to these speakers, the Ohio General Assembly has failed to keep up with inflation in terms of funding our public universities. Between 2017 and 2018, “state

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/college/2017/09/13/heres-how-much-security-costs-when-an-incendiary-speaker-comes-to-campus/37434939/>

funding for higher education grew by 1.3%”², despite an inflation rate of 2.2%³. According to *The Columbus Dispatch*, “the slowing support comes as higher-education institutions continue to face pressure about the cost of college and student’s ability to repay loans.”⁴

As a citizen, taxpayer, voter, and public-university student, I urge you to vote against this Bill in order to prevent parts of my tuition from going toward to funding security for these types of situations.

² <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20180129/public-universities-struggle-as-ohio-other-states-put-brakes-on-funding>

³ <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/community/financial-and-economic-education/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-and-inflation-rates-1913>

⁴ <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20180129/public-universities-struggle-as-ohio-other-states-put-brakes-on-funding>