

Chair Tom Young, Ranking Member Joseph A. Miller, and House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Michael Grifka Wander, and I am a PhD candidate at the Ohio State University. I am strongly opposed to House Bill 151 and its companion bill in the Ohio Senate. While it espouses the virtues of intellectual diversity and free and open inquiry, it would in fact guarantee the opposite.

During my time teaching and learning at OSU, I have been exposed to a variety of opinions and political positions. I have never seen someone be insulted or told they were wrong on a matter of personal opinion. What I have seen is people discuss the merits of various ideas, and occasionally change their minds. This includes ideas that are seen as progressive or liberal, as well as conservative. A professor's job is to facilitate these conversations, and assist students in evaluating the possibilities at hand. A student may be upset by the existence of other people's opinions, but to decide that someone being upset means a subject cannot be discussed is an abrogation not only of free speech, but of the very point of a university.

And yet, by preventing any discussion of "controversial subjects", this bill aims to do just that. If I cannot speak on race, gender, and other controversial topics freely, then my free speech rights are being violated. The same is true for faculty, staff, and students. We all deserve to be able to bring our thoughts into the marketplace of ideas. This does not mean someone else has to buy them. The bill proposes that universities add the following to their mission statements: "Institution will educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth" and "Institution affirms that its duty is to equip students with the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance". Ironically, this bill would prevent those very missions from being carried out. If I am forbidden from speaking freely about issues of national and international importance, then how can I demonstrate free and open inquiry to my students? How can they learn to reach their own conclusions—let alone informed ones—when the state is implicitly telling them which conclusions are allowable, because others are forbidden from conversation?

I understand that some people feel that universities are educating people into a certain ideology. Respectfully, I do not think those people have been on a college campus for any length of time. My students and colleagues disagree with me, as I disagree with some of them, and I wish to keep it that way. I ask you to allow free inquiry to thrive and not to determine what students and faculty can discuss, can decide, or can say publicly. Do not become the very threat this bill supposedly eradicates.

Please, consider my testimony, and vote no on this misguided bill. Thank you.

Michael Grifka Wander