

Testimony of Kathleen D. Clark, Ph.D., Professor, University of Akron
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 15, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Kathleen D. Clark, and I am a professor of Communication at the University of Akron, where I have taught for 25 years. I do not represent the University of Akron but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

I am in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151 because it would preclude me from teaching core courses in my discipline, in particular the first-year public speaking course, and a third-year general education course in domestic cultural diversity. Both are courses I have been teaching regularly for some years, the public speaking course since 1998.

In the first-year public speaking course, key principles are to consider audience, argument, evidence, and effective and ethical use of language in the preparation of informative and persuasive speeches. This course is based on enduring principles that are intended to help all students learn both how to craft a speech and serve as ethical audience members. With practice in researching, crafting, and delivering speeches and learning how to serve as ethical audience peer reviewers for each other, students are learning at the beginning of their college educations to participate in our democracy skillfully and effectively, no matter their personal opinions.

I am concerned that this bill proposes to severely limit the free expression of ideas with appropriate consideration of audience, occasion, evidence, argument and purpose of the speech no matter how conservative or liberal the student.

In the case of Intercultural Communication, the third-year course that meets a domestic diversity general education requirement, the emphasis is on helping students understand the diversity of members of cultures they may encounter in their workplace, classroom, community, and/or families, and how those cultural differences impact their worldview, values, and interactions with others who are different from themselves. The goal of the course goes beyond helping students realize that they have a particular cultural location in our society, as does each person they meet, and how those differences can make a difference when they communicate. The goal is to better equip them with understanding that can make them more competent intercultural communicators in their workplaces, schools, communities, and personal relationships.

I am concerned that an unintended consequence of Sub. SB 83 would be to prevent me teaching such a course as it deals with the possibility that students will encounter others with different perspectives and perceive those differences as threatening, rather than learning how to recognize, appreciate, and work with others effectively.