

Testimony of Stacey Benton DVM, PhD
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 17, 2023

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

My name is Stacey Benton, and I am a professor of Veterinary Technology at The University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, where I have taught for 11 years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in **opposition** to Substitute House Bill 151. I submit this written testimony as both a university professor and a mother of two college students.

I would like to go on the record in opposition to Substitute HB 151 in its entirety. However, I will focus my testimony on only two impacts of the bill as I'm certain my colleagues across Ohio will be commenting on other aspects. As I'm sure many of you on this committee are familiar with, there is an ongoing shortage of veterinary professionals, including veterinarians and credentialed veterinary technicians, throughout Ohio. I educate and train veterinary technicians at one of the oldest and most respected accredited vet tech programs in Ohio. Our faculty must include licensed veterinarians because we perform veterinary medical procedures as part of the curriculum. Professors do not earn as high a salary as practicing veterinarians, so it has become extremely difficult to attract veterinarians to open faculty positions in our department. What makes teaching attractive to veterinarians are the benefits packages afforded through the collective bargaining process. Without collective bargaining, it will be much harder to attract high quality veterinary professionals to teaching, which will limit the ability of vet tech programs throughout Ohio to educate students at the rate required to support the needs of the vast Ohio veterinary community. It's been suggested that the collective bargaining process hurts students because of the threat to strike. I believe quite the opposite is true. By protecting faculty and staff, the collective bargaining process helps to attract high quality faculty to professional programs like mine, which in turn guarantees student access to a quality education. I teach because I'm passionate about educating students in the profession I adore. I don't want to strike; I want to be in the classroom and lab. The collective bargaining process affords me job protection and peace of mind so I can give my students the attention *they* deserve.

As an educator and a parent, I want my students to be challenged in a classroom that welcomes all perspectives. We don't become lifelong learners by studying what we know; we become lifelong learners by exploring what we don't. A classroom that welcomes *all* perspectives is a safe place to be uncomfortable, ask difficult question, learn about yourself and others, and develop an approach to problem solving that can last a lifetime. It's ok to challenge existing knowledge and theory in the classroom. That's how we truly expand our skills. Conservative and liberal thinkers alike know this to be true, and they've learned this in the *same* classrooms, together. Substitute House Bill 151 does not protect students access to education. Instead, it limits and confines the free exploration of knowledge to topics deemed safe from a political or cultural perspective. This is problematic because the

definition of unacceptable topics for the classroom is not universal. While purporting to protect student access to education, Substitute HB 151 actually diminishes the educational opportunities and experiences for all Ohio students. That is NOT what I want for my students as an educator, and it is most definitely not what I want for my children as a parent.

I urge the committee to vote against Substitute House Bill 151.

Thank you.