

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony regarding HB 151. My name is Elizabeth Wardle and I am a faculty member who has spent all of my career training faculty and graduate students to innovate their teaching. I do that now at Miami University through the Howe Center for Writing Excellence, and I collaborate with my colleagues from across all public Ohio higher ed institutions through the Ohio College Teaching Consortium.

There is much to object to in HB 151, as others have described in written and oral testimony previously for the companion bill SB 83. Given my own expertise, I want to specifically focus on the effect of the bill on teaching in Ohio. I assume we all share the belief that all Ohioans deserve access to excellent public higher education so that our graduates can stay in Ohio and work to solve the challenging problems we all face today. That access and excellence would be seriously at risk if this bill passes, and in turn, our economy would greatly suffer. Students must want to stay in or come to Ohio in order for us to enroll students and continue to exist as institutions. In order for us to offer the best programs possible to recruit students, we must be accredited not only from the Higher Learning Commission but also from the professional accreditation bodies that oversee programs as diverse as nursing, engineering, speech pathology, and social work. Those accreditation bodies require not just one class on cultural competencies but a full education that prepares students to work with a wide variety of people—in other words, what this bill describes as “DEI.” This work needs to be infused across the curriculum where it makes sense. Requiring institutions to seek exemptions for every course that includes such content is not only nonsensical but also entirely impractical. The Chancellor’s office will be overwhelmed with paperwork, and institutions will waste time and precious resources submitting and processing paperwork. This aspect of the bill is not just detrimental but also shows a complete lack of awareness of how courses and approvals work and how much time it would take to engage in the processes outlined in the bill. If you are truly concerned about the cost of higher ed, then this aspect of the bill is entirely antithetical to your concerns.

The bill would have a chilling effect on excellent and innovative teaching. For example, it relies on student evaluations as half of a faculty member’s annual evaluation for teaching. This requirement demonstrates a lack of understanding about what scholars know about how to evaluate and also improve teaching. For many years now, student evaluations have been distributed digitally, and the national average for filling them out is 40%—and often in some departments or for some courses, the number is much lower. In other words, you are suggesting that faculty be evaluated via a tool that is simply not valid—the results do not represent what they are supposed to measure. At Miami, we understand this and instead require multiple measures of teaching such as observations, mid-course evaluations administered by the Center for Teaching Excellence, teaching portfolios, etc. And we strongly encourage faculty to engage in professional development to improve their teaching—and reward those efforts in annual evaluations and promotion and tenure processes. Relying on student evaluations will simply end the ability of faculty to try new things and act on best practices, and force them to slavishly seek to get students to “like” them so that they can get

good teaching evaluations and keep their jobs. Surely that is not your goal. It won't be good for Ohio in any way that legislators, parents, students, or corporations care about.

The requirement to include professional credentials on syllabi is another unrealistic and unproductive aspect of this bill that would simply result in more bureaucracy without any useful consequence. If you seek to ensure that students be able to learn who their teachers are and what their expertise is, then it would be far easier to recognize that most departments have online directories and those could be required to be updated every year.

Requiring faculty to share not just complete syllabi and course calendars but also discussion notes and lectures online is not only serious overreach into their intellectual property, but also another indication that the bill's sponsors don't understand even the most basic principles of good teaching. Good teaching is not lecturing with notes that stay the same year to year. Good teaching responds to the students in the classroom and their needs. Often, faculty create detailed calendars one unit at a time, as they learn where students need more or less coverage and scaffolding. "Flipped classrooms" and project-based courses are common, and do not entail lecture notes or PowerPoints. Again, if you want Ohio faculty to offer the best education in the county, then requiring them to share in advance all aspects of a course is not the way to that goal.

By now it is clear that this bill did not originate in Ohio and is instead the brainchild of national think tanks such as the Goldwater and Manhattan Institutes. These outside interests do not have the best interests of Ohioans in mind. They seek to destroy higher education and deny our students the opportunity to learn to think critically and solve hard problems. In the process of doing this, they would destroy the economy of Ohio, as employers and companies would go elsewhere to find graduates who can meet their needs. Again, as outsiders, this does not concern them. But it should concern all of us.

If you want to encourage innovate, fair, inclusive teaching that embraces diversity of thought and enacts best practices, work with us as faculty and faculty developers, rather than responding to the whims of outside interests. Following these outsiders has led to bills that amount to big government and unfunded mandates. HB 151 would increase the cost of college in Ohio while destroying innovation, good teaching, and the economy at the same time. I urge you all to vote no on this destructive bill.