

Testimony of Janet Klein, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 16, 2023

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

My name is Janet Klein, and I am a Professor of History at the University of Akron, where I have taught for eighteen 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. If passed, this bill will work to undermine public higher education in Ohio instead of enhance it. Indeed, the bill's provisions will likely have dire unintended consequences, which may very well result in the departure of students and qualified faculty from higher education and from Ohio itself. In short, Ohio will face a "brain drain."

During my time at the University of Akron I have had the privilege to engage with so many students from various backgrounds. History can be a difficult topic to approach, but what I hope my students leave the classroom having obtained is not a different political perspective but the ability to critically analyze a range of primary and secondary sources and to be able to engage civilly with people who think differently from them. This is a life skill and one that will help them in whatever employment they choose. Students with liberal and conservative views (and students who are largely apolitical) will all benefit from these skills.

While SB83 was being discussed last month my students raised concerns in class discussion. Students of various political persuasions were frightened that the provisions of the bill would diminish the quality of their education and even the value that a degree from an Ohio university would carry forward. Some students expressed that they would leave Ohio to continue their education. Indeed, as you are surely aware, this has already begun to happen in Florida. Colleagues from universities in Florida have told me that since the passage of similar bills there, they have seen applications decline, students making plans to transfer out of state, and candidates for faculty positions withdraw their applications. Hiring committees have reported that they are not able to attract their candidates of choice. Ohio students deserve to have the degree that they pay for mean something when they apply for employment or graduate school. They deserve to have the most qualified faculty possible to train them for their futures. Ohio needs to keep (and attract) the best and the brightest as we move into the future.

Others have (and will) testify about specific provisions in this bill. What I hope to have reminded you here is that the limits on academic freedom, the destruction of the tenure system, and the attack on organized labor in this extreme bill will drive students and faculty away, thus resulting in the destruction, rather than the enhancement, of higher education in Ohio. It will carry dire consequences for the economic future of Ohio as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill. I welcome any questions you might have.

