

**Opponent Testimony for Ohio House Bill 151  
Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act  
Higher Education Committee  
Representatives Steve Demetriou and Josh Williams, sponsors  
Wednesday May 17, 2023**

**Margaret Newell, ASC Distinguished Professor of History  
Ohio State University**

Chairman Young, Representatives Demetriou and Williams, and members of the Higher Education Committee: thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Margaret Newell. I am a history professor at Ohio State University. I speak for myself and am not here as a representative of the University, but as a patriot who loves researching and teaching Early American history. I'm here to express concern at the censorship this bill embodies.

SB 83/HB 151 are not about Ohio. These bills are the product of outside political think tanks. Similar legislation with the same language has appeared in 17 other states. These bills identify faculty political beliefs as a problem that needs to be legislated against; yet no students testified in favor of the Senate companion bill. Many of the requirements of HB 151 are redundant and seem designed to intimidate faculty and expose them to doxing and harassment. Syllabi are already published for students, and we have established channels for student complaints. Students already evaluate courses, and departments take these evaluations seriously. It's hard to see how conservatives will be attracted to the profession under the contingent and bureaucracy-laden working conditions created by the bill's provisions.

I'm grateful that the legislature thinks American history is important. I'm here at Ohio State because I fell in love with the American Revolution in a college classroom. I teach that subject now. Last spring my class included a student who had attended CPAC, and another who wanted an internship at the Federalist Society. I know this because they felt comfortable telling me about these experiences. C-SPAN filmed one of my class lectures about creating the republic through state constitution writing. I now receive email from people across the U.S. I can't always tell their political affiliation, and I suspect they are not sure what mine is.

We know more about the Revolution than we did when I was a student because of all the research that faculty at places like Ohio State do. In my class we read the Declaration of Independence—as well as resolutions by grassroots colonial committees whose language and ideas Jefferson borrowed. We read the Federalist Papers and the Constitution—as well as the writings of anti-Federalist opponents of the Constitution (probably a majority at the time). My students learn that British protection of Native American land rights in the Ohio country helps explain Virginians' turn toward independence. We discuss George Washington's generalship and commitment to civilian control of the military even when leaders weren't doing what he wanted them to do. We also learn about Washington's relentless pursuit of his runaway slave Ona Judge. All these stories—controversial and not—are part of America's complex past and present. They all deserve space in our national narrative.

Defining certain subjects as controversial, and banning them, is censorship. Telling instructors that they can't teach subjects related to policy is not only censorship but damaging to good public policy. Having an opening prayer at the First Continental Congress in 1774 was controversial. The Constitution was controversial in 1787. This body took the vote away from Black Ohioans at the moment of statehood; state and local government didn't restore it unconditionally until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If you break our public university system, you'll be breaking something precious and valuable to Ohioans, something that is hard to put back together. Our students in all majors--whether artists, neuroscientists, or philosophers--deserve the best and most accomplished faculty who are leading researchers in their fields, regardless of politics.