

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
House Committee on Higher Education
November 15, 2023
[Rola Rimawi, MD]
[Parent of an OSU student]

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Rola Rimawi.

1. I am a physician and mother of three current college students, soon to be four college students.
2. I am writing to express concern that the Senate Bill 83 will restrict diversity, inclusion and the freedom of students of certain ethnic or religious backgrounds (specifically Muslim) to fully express themselves and feel welcomed in higher education institutions. Students should have the right to discover their interests, goals and priorities and this is an integral part of their college experiences. Understanding and defining cultural, religious and moral values should be up to the student, not the institution to limit and impose barriers to that self discovery process. Many of these student clubs help to advocate, uplift and support students who are looking for belonging. Diversity and inclusion training is integral to opening dialogue between groups and understanding of other backgrounds, which reduces behaviors such as Antisemitism and Islamophobia and is therefore necessary. I cannot understand how limits on holding a public opinion on public policy is beneficial to students going out into the real world and required to formulate and stand by their own choices. Also limiting majors in ethnic, religion, and society courses is counter productive to a well rounded education.
1. I attended NYU in New York as an undergraduate. Though I was a pre-med student, my major was Near Eastern Studies and Religion. I am extremely fortunate to have taken comparative religion courses, advanced arabic classes and learn about a region of the world I would not have otherwise known about from knowledgeable and experienced individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives.. It made me a more well-rounded individual and a much better physician who could relate and understand myself and those of other backgrounds better. I think it would be a major disadvantage to the education of students to take that privilege away if they want to pursue those fields. I also felt a strong sense of belonging when I congregated with people of my own background, culture and religion and that helped me better understand myself.

My children have looked forward to college in great part to find their "people" and those who came from a similar background and culture and specifically chose public universities with more students for this purpose. Social well being is a huge component in feeling adjusting and comfortable in college. Finding those groups with like-minded people is critical especially in their first year. These groups have served to support and nurture them and have become families away from home. My children, their friends and future

generations of students will be negatively impacted by this bill. Inclusion and diversity in college are necessary and affect a student's well being, emotional state and future success.

Bill SB 83 is extremely harmful to students, especially Muslim students, who need a sense of belonging with those of their own cultural and religious backgrounds.

Diversity and inclusion training, majors related to religion and society, cultural groups that advocate for students and human rights, advocating for policies that are important are critical to developing social responsibility and maturity and should not be taken away from any student.

1. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote to remove this bill.
2. Thank you.
3. Rola Rimawi, MD