

Opposition Testimony for Senate Bill 83 (SB83)  
House Higher Education Committee  
November 15, 2023  
Joshua Ferry, 3rd year student at Cleveland State  
Ohio Student Association (OSA)

Chair Tom Young, Vice Chair Gayle Manning, Ranking member Miller, and members of the committee. My name is Joshua Ferry. I am a third-year student at Cleveland State University studying political science and urban studies. I am also a longtime Ohioan, living in Lakewood my entire life. Today, I am here to express concern and opposition towards Senate Bill 83 in its entirety. Ohio Senate Bill 83, otherwise known as the "Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act" is a deceptive bill that in reality is meant to gut the higher education system as we know it. It uses deceptive language that is meant to trick the reader, with phrases like "fullest degree of intellectual diversity". The reality is that SB 83 is a middle finger to both the ideas of diversity and education.

One key line component is that Senate Bill 83 will "allow and encourage students to reach their conclusions about all controversial beliefs and policies" (Cirino, 748-850). This would encourage students to make up their own interpretation on important historical events, such as slavery and the Holocaust, and deny that those events took place. It will open up Pandora's box for a two-sided argument, on issues that any rational human being would know don't have two sides. For example, a student could write an academic essay that climate change does not exist, and use SB83 as a legal ground. As somebody who enjoys history, this scares me to see that the next generation of students could become Holocaust, slavery and/or climate change deniers.

As the United States becomes a more diverse country, it is objectively clear that students should be prepared to interact with those of a more diverse background. By gutting DEI training, as SB 83 alludes to, students will not have this ability when interacting with students that don't look or think like them. In a study from Brookings, the Race-ethnic profile for both the total US population and population under 16 found that there was a decline in the white race. For the total population it went from 69.1% (2000) to 60.1% (2019) and for the population under 16 it went from 60.8% (2000) to 49.95% (2019). In addition to that there were gains made for those who are considered Latino and Hispanics, as well as Asian Americans and multiracial (2+ and other races). Due to the demographic changes, it is important that you allow schools to have DEI training reflecting this trend of less white Americans and more non-white Americans. In diverse communities in Ohio, such as in Cleveland and Columbus, SB83 will drive these groups out of the state, and might even drive whites out that are looking for more diverse and inclusive states like Michigan.

Senate Bill 83 will affect everybody—students, professors, policy makers and other stakeholders will be impacted by the devastation of SB 83. However, Ohio’s higher education system will be impacted the most though. As Ohio gets a worse reputation for its education, there will be more students motivated to go to schools in states like Michigan. The purpose of this testimony is to inform rather than persuade you. What is going on in Florida and other states that are banning books for nonsense reasons, could easily happen here in Ohio, and whether you think it or not, will have devastating impacts on our state, and therefore our state's economy, and nobody likes losing money, right?

Don’t just take my word for it, as many policy and higher education experts have weighed as to why to oppose SB83. For example, Sara Kilpatrick, executive director of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors. “We’re putting a big red flag to faculty around the country that you don’t want to come to Ohio.” Pranav Jani, director of the Asian American studies program and associate professor in the Department of English at Ohio State University stated “Ohio Senate Bill 83 isn’t just trying to roll back a few programs, but an entire legacy of protest and transformation”. Last but not least, Piet van Lier, senior researcher at Policy Matters Ohio called SB83 a “gag order” with a “chilling effect” on Ohio’s higher education institute, and that its broadness would “make people nervous about what they can say and do”. In addition, many student governments as well as presidents and deans of institutions have condemned this bill earlier this year.

In addition to these scholars, earlier this year when the initial testimony was held, hundreds of concerned Ohio citizens (including myself) voiced their opposition towards SB 83, including students, professors, and union members. There are plenty of other valid reasons that Senate Bill 83 will be harmful. I’d highly encourage you to educate yourself using the link below from Honesty for Ohio Education, a nonpartisan and statewide organization which advocates for a better education for everybody, regardless of race, gender, religion and other characteristics.

With all of this being said, I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote ‘NO’ on SB 83—not just for myself, but for the hundreds of Ohioans from every walk of life that have expressed opposition towards this disgusting and heinous bill.

Thanks for taking the opportunity to read this testimony.

I am open to any questions, comments or concerns you may have.

Joshua P. Ferry

Email: [Joshf0904@gmail.com](mailto:Joshf0904@gmail.com)

Phone: (216) 394-3334

P.s. If you have any further questions or clarifications, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me

Brookings study:

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>

Honesty for Ohio Education:

<https://www.honestyforohioeducation.org/sb-83.html>.