

**Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
House Committee on Higher Education
November 15, 2023**

**[Mariam Abaza, Student]
[The Ohio State University]**

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mariam Abaza and I am a current first-year at Ohio State majoring in journalism and public policy. As a Palestinian, Syrian, and Indian Muslim Woman, I have often had trouble finding a community in which I can feel comfortable.

Within my first month at Ohio State, I had found a home within the Muslim Student Association; no matter the diverse backgrounds of other members, we all had the same shared love of Islam. SB83 would prohibit clubs based on religion, disbanding the sole connection I have to this home away from home.

When I felt isolated and depressed at the start of the Palestinian crisis, I was able to find comfort in the Students for Justice in Palestine group education sessions. These meetings let me know I was not alone, while also giving me the strength to continue my education and school life regardless of my heartbreak. SB83 would prohibit ethnicity-based clubs and orgs that talk about “controversial” topics, forcing me to feel this pain alone and without solace.

The reason that I chose Ohio State was because I received a full-tuition scholarship from the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This assured me that Ohio State was committed to increasing the diversity of the school, making me feel comfortable that I would not feel isolated at a racially homogenous school. If SB83 was passed, DEI would likely be unable to continue this program, effectively eliminating droves of capable diverse students from attending Ohio State.

This bill labels anything relating to race or the identity of marginalized communities as “controversial.” My life is not controversial. My experiences are not controversial. My goals are not controversial. I should not be forced to walk on eggshells and avoid buzzwords when describing my lived experiences. No student should be expected to cater their own experiences to make the listeners more comfortable.

As a college student, especially one studying public policy as a future member of government, it is vital that I am taught and exposed to controversial topics. By passing SB83, the government risks stifling our ability to explore and understand controversial issues, limiting our contribution as informed and engaged members of society. It bars the basic freedoms of speech and assembly promised to all Americans by the first amendment. When all students are spoon fed the same information and barred from exposure to new ideas, how can they contribute as useful members of society? This bill aims to create a new generation of mindless robots who cannot speak or think for themselves. Is this seriously the best future for America?

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no for SB83 to protect and serve students.