

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

**[Wahida Abaza, MD Pediatrician]
[Nationwide Children's Hospital]**

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 Dr. Wahida Abaza. I am a local pediatrician who has lived and worked in the state of Ohio for the last 22 years. I am a proud product of public university undergraduate and medical school education. I am an active member of the youth department of the Noor Islamic Cultural center and I am passionate about interfaith work. I am the mother of two Ohio State University students. I strongly oppose this bill for many reasons.

As a pediatrician, I have had the privilege of caring for children through the age of 19 years. Time and time again, I have seen that new students who have found their community at college fare better than their more isolated and lonely counterparts. That community often comes in the form of religious groups, ethnicity based organizations, single gender sports teams or fraternity/sorority life. This allows for a sense of belonging and “home away from home”. With the increase in depression and anxiety among teens today, these safe spaces of comfort are essential. Many studies have linked religious communities with better overall mental health, academic achievement and family ties.

As an assistant professor of pediatrics at the Ohio State University, I have had the pleasure of working with exceptional medical and nursing students. I fear that this bill would impact the university’s ability to continue to attract the best students, faculty and researchers, and thus decrease the quality of Ohio higher education and as a result, the Ohio workforce. Bright young students and young professionals eager to start families would likely pick other states and regions due to the restrictions imposed by this bill.

Ohio’s public colleges and universities currently have a strong commitment to protecting freedom of speech that creates an academic environment of open discourse and rigorous inquiry. Differing viewpoints are encouraged, and not silenced. I have developed critical thinking skills throughout my university education and a restriction of this would be a disservice to every student.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on Bill 83. Thank you.

