

Testimony of Erynn Beaton, Ph.D., M.B.A.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 15, 2023

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

My name is Erynn Beaton. I am an associate professor at the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for over 6 years. I do not represent OSU but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen opposing Senate Bill 83.

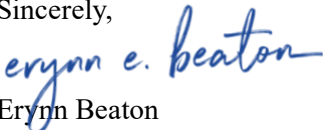
The core question raised by S.B. 83 is: does the state trust university trustees? Universities are held accountable for the issues raised in the bill by their board of trustees, so if S.B. 83 is necessary, trustees must not be fulfilling their duties. If trustees are trusted, the overlegislation in S.B. 83 is unnecessary. If trustees are not trusted, they should be replaced. Overlegislating, rather than attending to the root issue, would result in a series of unintended consequences.

One unintended but undeniable consequence of S.B. 83 is administrative bloat. Higher education already dedicates massive resources to administration. This bill requires universities to engage in a slew of unnecessary bureaucratic red tape, which will contribute to administrative bloat. While it may seem as if many of these tasks are easy, I assure you that in a large university, every administrative task is consequential and costly. A small sampling of the contributors to administrative bloat in this bill includes publicly posting every course syllabus every semester (Sec. 3345.029), creating new and revising existing policies (Sec. 3345.45; Sec. 3345.452), revising existing student evaluation processes (Sec. 3345.451), and creating ongoing reports (Sec. 3345.029; Sec. 3345.0217; Sec. 3345.0218; Sec. 3345.80). The administrative tasks will cost taxpayers money and displace resources away from student support.

Another unintended consequence of S.B. 83 that may be less obvious to those who do not work in higher education today but that is very apparent to faculty is how this bill would hinder rather than support intellectual diversity. Here's what I foresee happening if it passes: Students, upset by the censorship of their education, will make a barrage of complaints against tenured conservative faculty who advocate conservative ideologies in their courses. (I have personal knowledge of students making such complaints.) Students – especially racial and ethnic minorities, women, and those with secular beliefs – will give all faculty, but especially conservative faculty, extremely low ratings on the bill's classroom bias evaluation question. Based on these complaints and ratings, conservative faculty members, under the provisions of this bill, can be taken up for post-tenure review, and some may even be terminated for cause after all of these hurdles fail to change student ratings. The result is less ideological diversity than before. Meanwhile, scholars at the top of their field will not want to work in a state with such restrictive policies; students will not want to attend Ohio universities; and by virtue of both these outcomes, Ohio academic programs will languish in the rankings.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unnecessary and harmful bill.

Sincerely,


Erynn Beaton