

Written Testimony of Cynthia J. Osborn

I write as an individual citizen of Ohio, a registered voter, and a resident of Portage County for 26 years. I also happen to be a university professor, hired in 1997 at Kent State University to teach and advise students in the Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) program, a program that includes a nationally accredited 60-hour master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, as well as a certificate in addictions counseling. Both programs prepare students for credentialing by State of Ohio regulatory boards to practice Professional Counseling and Chemical Dependency Counseling.

I write in strong opposition to the current version of HB83 that is scheduled to be undertaken for further consideration by the **House Higher Education Committee on 11/29/2023**. The current version continues to micromanage many aspects of operation of state institutions of higher education, including encroaching on the established principle and practice of a tenured full-time faculty member's academic freedom. Many of the courses I teach are in addictions counseling. Addiction and addiction care in the United States can be considered "**controversial beliefs and policies**" (although these are not included in the draft list of such beliefs and policies in Section 3345.0217 of HB83), including federal legislation and regulation of cannabis, fentanyl, and other Schedule I drugs, as well as harm reduction practices, such as medications for opioid use disorder. For me to not be able to address these and other "controversial beliefs" in the classroom (e.g., where and how illicit fentanyl is manufactured and distributed) ill-prepares students for the real-world of addiction care. This is but one example of the vague definition of "controversial belief or policy" – which, as written in Section 3345.0217 (A) (1) of the draft of HB83, is limited to "political controversy."

I am also struck by the vague definition of "**intellectual diversity**" as defined in Section 3345.0217 (A) (2) of the draft of HB83, which seems to run counter to Section 3345.0216 (A) that indicates each state institution of higher education is to declare to "educate students...to seek the truth." In this section, the implication is there is one "truth," which is certainly not the case when it comes to definitions and theories of addiction, as well as methods for preventing and treating addiction.

For me to be required by a potential state law to even seek an exemption by a Governor-appointed Chancellor of Higher Education so that I can teach future behavioral health providers (i.e., state-licensed mental health counselors and chemical dependency counselors) about matters of **diversity, equity, and inclusion** – including how addiction affects racially and ethnically minoritized citizens of Ohio in unique ways – is appalling. This is also true for matters of **social justice** in addictions care. I have been successful in garnering \$1.8M in federal training and workforce development dollars since 2020 to train and prepare Kent State University students, faculty, and staff in recommended addictions care strategies. One of these federal training grants requires me, as the Principal Investigator, to ensure students supported by this grant receive instruction in cultural humility and responsiveness. Why should I seek an exemption to do so from the Ohio Chancellor of Higher Education? The proposed requirement to request an exemption to teach these essential concepts and practices to future clinical mental health counselors and addictions counselors is an insult to my professional judgment that has been informed by my almost 30 years of graduate studies and scholarly inquiry.

I beseech the elected members of the Ohio House of Representatives Higher Education Committee to vote in opposition to the current version of HB83.