

Testimony of Dr. Ashley Hope Pérez, PhD,  
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2023 Alumni Teaching Award Recipient

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 Ashley Hope Pérez, and I am an assistant professor of comparative studies at The Ohio State University. I received the 2023 Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award and am committed to the effective and complete education of every OSU student. I do not represent OSU today, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

I have many concerns about this bill, and I urge the committee to vote against it. I will focus on its negative effects for students, particularly in terms of their prospects to be competitive in a 21<sup>st</sup> century professional landscape. Although the bill purports to protect intellectual diversity, in fact its effect is to suppress all voices and limit meaningful dialogue in classroom spaces. Why should this worry us? The bill disrupts one of the most essential functions of higher education, which is to cultivate students' critical thinking about different positions on complex issues. Under SB 83, professors risk accusations of "taking sides" any time they introduce students to the key debates and research base in their area of expertise.

Faculty already know how to encourage intellectual diversity, and they must do so in balance with the need to ensure that students gain essential knowledge and skills. One geology student may find climate change controversial; however, if the professor does not teach it, or teaches it with an emphasis on minority views of the science to avoid being targeted for imbalance, all students in the class receive a subpar education on the issues. This is not intellectual diversity but rather intellectual dilution/distortion. Students enter the workforce with skewed frames that put them at a disadvantage professionally. The same is true of medical students who have been "shielded" from information about race-correlated health issues, computer scientists who have not been taught to consider the role of bias in artificial intelligence, and students in many other areas.

SB 83 interferes with the educators best positioned to guide students into the essential debates and issues of their fields. It paves the way to an Ohio education that can only be counted on to effectively prepare students to think about *uncontroversial* issues. But in today's labor market, neither students nor Ohio leaders have room to gamble with the quality of education.

SB 83 interferes with the effectiveness of the very institutions and learning processes it pretends to enhance. I ask you to vote "no" on any form of this counterproductive bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.