

Testimony of Jennifer M. Cunningham, Ph.D.  
Before the House Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
November 27, 2023

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

My name is Jennifer Cunningham, and I am an associate professor of English at Kent State University, where I have taught for ten years. I do not represent Kent State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

As the Writing Program Coordinator at Kent State since 2018, I have had the opportunity to oversee the first-year writing courses and work with the instructors who teach them as well as many first-year students who enroll. The right to bargain over retrenchment, evaluations, and tenure remains important for instructors who teach first-year writing by providing real job protections. As the person who conducts and oversees faculty evaluations and works with instructors and students if concerns arise, annual faculty evaluations are unnecessary micromanagement, given that we already have our own tailored systems of evaluations. Mandating post-tenure review and would give broad authority to administrators to call for post-tenure review at any time, which would effectively eliminate meaningful tenure in Ohio. As a tenured faculty member who sits on several committees that oversee the tenure process, this is punitive and unnecessary. This version of the bill also opens faculty to unsubstantiated complaints about restricting “intellectual diversity” in their classrooms. Our instructors enjoy academic freedom and agency to choose their own themes and materials in order to teach writing and the writing process. Our instructors are experts in our field and ought to be trusted and respected. Finally, this bill maintains that detailed syllabi and instructor contact information and course schedules be easily accessible and searchable on university websites, which would open up faculty to harassment.

SB 83-11 remains an unacceptable version of the bill and would harm academic freedom, union rights, job protections, quality education, and the ability to attract and keep the best and brightest students and faculty. I urge you not to pass it.

Sincerely,

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