

Maria Vitória de Rezende Grisi
Testimony on SB 83
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
November 29, 2023

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Maria Vitória, and I am a third-year Ph.D. student in the Studies of the Portuguese-Speaking World program at OSU. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83.

Unfortunately, I'm getting eerily comfortable coming to the statehouse. I say unfortunately because it's not for good reasons. Last time, more than 350 people spoke against SB 83, compared to roughly 27 in favor. It's a significant difference that has been ignored over and over again.

Since I arrived in the US in 2021, I have often asked myself where can I find democracy in this country? Fortunately, I have seen many instances where the voice of the majority has been heard. However, I can't say that is a constant. We have recently seen the citizens of Ohio vote on important issues such as number 1 and 2. What we also saw was the

reaction of some representatives that want to challenge the popular vote. That should be unacceptable in a government that claims to be a representative democracy.

But what does that have to do with SB 83? Everything. Students, faculty, citizens of Ohio have urged you all to drop this bill, and instead reach out to the community to hear about the real, pressing issues that affect the universities. We want students to choose Ohio universities, we want them to be able to afford their studies, to help develop this state, and to push for changes. We want Ohio universities to be receptive, open, and appealing. Above all, we want all voices to be heard. Unfortunately, this bill is not about that.

I'd like to highlight an important fact of Senator Jerry Cirino's event "Ohio Senate's Public University Trustee Symposium" hosted at the Statehouse. The panel on "Securing Intellectual Diversity" did not include any Ohio professors. I'm curious why this was the case. Was it hard to find an Ohio professor who genuinely felt they were a victim of insufficient intellectual diversity? I raise this point as the absence of local academics questions the necessity of Senate Bill 83.

Moving on. It seems very contradictory at its core to think that you would need a bill to enforce freedom of speech. A bill that wants to determine what is controversial, and what it isn't, what should be on a syllabus and what shouldn't. Don't you all have a feeling that this bill does the opposite of what it stands for?

The US has been lucky enough to maintain a democratic regime since its foundation. And I use the word lucky because that is not representative of the world history. I come from Brazil where we endured a military dictatorship for 21 years from 1964 until 1985. It all started because a group of people in power feared the rise of a communist threat. It all started because of fear. A fear that led out democratic state to ruins and that killed more than 450 people and tortured more than 20.000. Yes, I know this is the extreme. And I know that I might be stretching the comparison. What I want you to get from this experience is that no fear-based politics lead to positive scenarios.

The fear of some of you in this room have made SB 83 come to life. But we will not respond with fear or intimidation. We are here to stand for our universities as spaces for debate, for different opinions, for students

to learn tools to stand up for whatever they believe in. We don't want to avoid the challenging topics. That creates a bubble that will never represent the world these students will face when they leave the University.

We will not let fear take away the freedom to the most democratic principle of them all: ALL VOICES MATTER. All topics are important and all of them need to be discussed from different perspectives. To do that we need to be able to provide all the tools so that students can learn how to argument, how to position themselves in the world.

I urge you all to think about the voices that have spoken. I urge you to reach out to the community, to the students, to the faculty. Visit the campuses, listen to the real demands. Don't a fear-based project assume control of Ohio. I urge you all to vote no for SB 83.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions.