

04.19.2023

We, the undersigned hailing from Bowling Green State University, Central State University, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Miami University, The Ohio State University, University of Cincinnati, and Youngstown State University, representing more than [insert number here] college students across the State of Ohio, do hereby write and publish our vehement opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 83, also known as, the Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act.

Senate Bill 83, if passed, could upend the very academic freedoms and integrity with which proponents of said bill claim it would enhance. In our view and experiences, this bill seeks to impose unreasonably authoritative expectations and restrictions upon what is taught, and how discussions are had, within college classrooms which could be potentially detrimental to student learning. Should this bill pass as is, the curriculum of professors could be subjected to the censorship of elected officials, many of whom have no working experience in higher education. Conversations on topics deemed “uncomfortable”, such as abortion, the LGBTQ+ community, climate change and even religion, could be heavily restricted or even fully disallowed in college classrooms, and the sacred wall of idea exchanging and advocacy that sustains the post-secondary educable institution could be torn down for the sake of governmental oversight and control.

As this bill requires college students to take a specified class on American Government, it would require us to read the Constitution of the United States of America, which would likely include discussions on the First Amendment and free speech. Limiting discourse in any capacity that does not disrupt the learning environment goes against that same first amendment right to freedom of speech and expression. If passed, this bill could stifle the very Constitutional rights of professors, students, and University officials. This bill could directly restrict the free speech of faculty, staff, and administration and their ability to teach their respective subjects. Moreover, such restrictions could be detrimental to the learning experience of our constituencies: over \_\_\_\_\_ students in the state of Ohio.

In our view, perhaps the most concerning provision this bill seeks to enact into law is the prohibition of mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training at all public colleges and universities within the State of Ohio. DEI programs and initiatives only serve the betterment of

college campuses, as, they diversify the demographic of these campuses, and expose individuals to external cultures and ways of life that they may otherwise never be exposed to including but not limited to different racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. As well, in a society where hate crimes have increased exponentially on college campuses nationwide, not the least which in Ohio, over the last half-decade; in our view DEI would actually promote the supposed “diversity of thought” which Senate Bill 83 is seeking to institute, not usurp it. In 21st-century America where people are frequently tasked with communication and collaboration with others who have different backgrounds, specifically in the workforce, we feel that adjusting DEI training or eliminating it altogether is to the detriment of all college students. As a result, we fear that the bill will lead to less students and faculty choosing to reside, work, and learn in Ohio.

We, the undersigned, urge the members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, to stop this bill in committee and to not let it see a vote on the Senate floor. If such is carried out, we then urge the Ohio Senate to not pass this harmful and restrictive piece of legislation. If both previous urges are fulfilled, we, the undersigned, urge the Ohio House of Representatives to not issue a concurrence on this piece of legislation. In the future, if there is ever another bill that seeks to adjust or significantly modify higher education, we urge the law makers that represent all of us as Ohioans to include students in the conversation. We, as college students, know that facilitating an environment where people can have healthy discourse is important, but it is in our belief as the elected leaders of our prospective student bodies, that this bill is not the way to accomplish this salient task. It is our belief that Senate Bill 83, if passed, could eliminate the true and beautiful diversity that exists on college campuses. By restricting the discussion and exchange of various ideas and opinions that make the college experience worthwhile and by replacing such ideas with rules that seek to limit the ability of institutions to facilitate these exchanges, the Ohio State House, in our view, would severely hinder the educational advantage that Ohio students enjoy. In our view, Senate Bill 83 should not and cannot stand.

Signed,

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