

**Testimony of Armand Alacbay
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Before the Ohio House of Representatives Higher Education Committee**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. By way of introduction, my name is Armand Alacbay, and I am with the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), a national nonpartisan organization whose mission for the past 27 years has been to promote what we call the “Three A’s”—academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability in higher education.

Senate Bill 83 addresses many issues that are important to the future of higher education not just in the State of Ohio, but across the nation. The first is bolstering lay governance, leadership, and accountability in higher education. The success of America’s higher education system, and what distinguishes it from that of any other country, is that it is not a unitary system governed as a single entity. Rather, it relies on the independent judgment of members of the public who sit on the governing boards of thousands of colleges and universities. In Ohio, these are called boards of trustees.

Unfortunately—and this is not unique to Ohio but is an issue nationwide—these volunteers often do not have the resources or training to perform their accountability function effectively. They are fully reliant on the institutions that they oversee to provide them with the information they need to keep up with a

complex, rapidly evolving higher education landscape. If trustees are to be thoughtful overseers, they need a thorough understanding of the duties of their role, higher education issues generally, and the specific challenges facing their states and their institutions. That is why Section 3333.045 of Senate Bill 83 is so important. One of the most critical lessons that university board members must learn is that the old adage “be true to your school” is misleading; trustees must serve the public interest first.

One of the central functions of a public university is to ensure that graduates leave with the core competencies essential to thrive not just in the job market, but also as informed citizens. The health of the nation’s democracy rests on the next generation having a shared understanding of the facts that comprise our nation’s history and also the ability to wrestle with these facts in context.

Our entire education system bears responsibility to impart this knowledge. But unfortunately, the higher education sector lags far behind where it should be. Out of the 1,100 four-year institutions that ACTA examines in our What Will They Learn?[®] project, only 18% require a foundational course in American history. Senate Bill 83 ensures that Ohio will avoid this trend. The bill mandates that institutions require students to take coursework that includes the study of key documents such as the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Gettysburg Address.

In closing, I want to leave the committee with the following quote by the twelfth president of the University of California, Clark Kerr: “The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.” This simple statement should be etched on every college and university building in America as it is the purpose of higher education. During a time in our nation’s history when students are being taught to shun ideas and many are being “canceled” or ostracized for thinking differently, Senate Bill 83 can return Ohio’s institutions of higher education to their intended purpose of seeking truth wherever it may lead.