

OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

Anisa Liban

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Hilliard, OH 43026

IN OPPOSITION OF:

Senate Bill 83

November 29, 2023

Good morning, Chair Yung, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and the House Workforce and Higher Education committee members. My name is Anisa Liban and I serve as the Government Affairs Director for the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, known as CAIR-Ohio. CAIR is America's largest civil rights and advocacy organization for American Muslims. At CAIR-Ohio, we provide pro-bono legal services and education to combat Islamophobia and uplift the Muslim community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony for Senate Bill 83. We strongly oppose this bill which presents a real threat to academic freedom and fails to protect and support faculty aiming to uphold fair learning environments.

If passed, Ohio higher educational institutions **will** be negatively impacted. We should never encourage censorship or any action that threatens the rights of faculty, staff, and students. Make no mistake, this bill was designed to target diversity, equity, and inclusion on college campuses and diminish decades-long efforts to establish protections for faculty, and foster inclusivity and intellectual diversity. Our students deserve the right to academic freedom, and our educators deserve the opportunity to encourage global citizenship.

We join many across the state in highlighting the long-lasting impact this bill will have on students—specifically Muslim students, faculty, and courses. This includes courses, such as Islamic Studies and student organizations, such as Muslim Students Association, which enrich campus life by enhancing the cultural, social, and intellectual life of the university. They play a vital role in advocating, uplifting and educating communities on various issues impacting staff and students both within and outside campus.

Ohio Muslims already face threats and obstacles that hinder their educational experiences and livelihood. As a result, our organization works tirelessly to support students who have been targets of bullying, harassment, or assault on campuses—which oftentimes is a direct result of misinformation. This is why a more inclusive curriculum, DEI, and other forms of cultural competence training are *necessary* to reduce individual and classroom biases.

Second, SB83 directly impacts academic liberty, employee rights, and policies based on race, gender—and many other facets of social engagement and innovation in Ohio public institutions. It also aims to ban partnerships with China which would mean a significant loss of funding for programs that connect Ohio to the world and make students global citizens. By restricting these partnerships, we deny our students valuable opportunities to engage in cross-cultural understanding, international collaboration, and the acquisition of global competencies. In today's interconnected world, these skills are essential for our students to thrive and compete on a global scale.

Finally, this bill would also require additional auditing which creates unnecessary mandates for staff. The burdensome micromanagement of academic programs and changes to the faculty workload policy will impact student resources and learning experiences. It will take away valuable time faculty can place into their classrooms and ensuring their curriculums include topics that promote intellectual diversity.

Academic freedom and equal opportunities for all individuals to succeed are fundamental principles that should guide our educational policies. By restricting academic freedom and diversity efforts, this bill undermines these principles and jeopardizes the ability of students to gain knowledge, learn about different cultures and viewpoints, and develop critical thinking skills. This poses a direct threat to the competitiveness and attractiveness of Ohio's public universities, potentially driving away talented individuals from our state.

The research is clear: creating a responsive environment for students is essential to their academic success. It allows Muslims and other historically underrepresented students to thrive, and become successful professionals, and contributing members of our society.

In conclusion, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 83 which is bad for students, higher education, and Ohio's economy. By doing so, you will protect the academic freedoms, diversity, and cultural richness that are essential for Ohio's future workforce and economic development. Your commitment to upholding the values of academic freedom, religious liberty, and a strong and competitive economy will have a profound impact on the lives of our students, the future of our state, and the integrity of our educational system. And I hope you take heed of the large number of opponent testimonies submitted against this bill.

We urge you to not pass SB83 and encourage policymakers to work to create inclusive practices that promote equity and understand the scope and outcomes associated with Islamophobia, antisemitism, and other forms of discrimination and hate from Ohio's campuses.

Thank you for your time and consideration.