

## Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83

Elizabeth Kenyon, Professor of Social Studies Education, Kent State University

House Higher Education Committee

November 29, 2023

Chairman Young, Vice Chairwoman Manning, Ranking Member Representative Miller and Members of the Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for receiving my written witness testimony. My Name is Elizabeth Kenyon.

I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I write as a faculty member at Kent State University, one of Ohio's many great state institutions of higher education. However, I do not write on behalf of the institution, but as a concerned citizen. In my role at the university, I prepare future teachers, most of whom go on to teach in Ohio's public schools. I love my job; I love our students. They are so passionate; they care so deeply about children, and they want to be prepared to teach them to live well in this world.

I work hard to maintain intellectual diversity in my classroom. I work hard to not express partisan leanings. I also work hard to ensure that my students are able to understand and affirm the full humanity of all their future students. This requires us discussing issues of identity, and I do so in a way that affirms the full humanity of all of Ohio's K-12 students. The ways in which "intellectual diversity" are defined in this bill will make this work much more challenging and will infuse it with fear.

In addition, I work hard both in my teaching and research to think about how we can support getting more teachers from marginalized communities into Ohio's classrooms. In 2017, 94% of Ohio's teachers were white. There is of course nothing bad about having an individual white teacher in a classroom, however, research has repeatedly shown that having a teacher who holds a similar identity, particularly regarding race and ethnicity, improves students' chances of success. Right now, too many of Ohio's students never experience, or very rarely experience, having a teacher that looks like them. Furthermore, research shows that pre-service teachers with marginalized ethnic and racial identities need support in navigating programs that were designed for white middle-class students and that this support needs to take race and ethnicity into consideration. Some of the support is financial, some is just facing the challenges of feeling isolated in a majority white program. This bill would make both forms of support more challenging to offer and would mitigate the success of many of our pre-service teachers at a time when the state is facing a huge teacher shortage.

Finally, one of the many things I love about my job is the people I work with. I feel so lucky to be able to say that. They are hardworking, passionate, and leaders in their field. We, the faculty, make our programs as strong as they are. We love our institution because of the distinctive mission it has, and the support it provides a wide array of students, like the large number of first-generation students we are privileged to serve. This bill would not only erode our institution's ability to keep its distinctive nature, it would also prompt several of us to start looking for jobs in other states.

Higher education is one of Ohio's many strengths. It draws people and industry to the state. It prepares the nurses, teachers, pilots, engineers, doctors, business leaders and so many others who make Ohio what it is today. This bill would diminish the strength of these institutions and inflict irreparable harm on the students, staff and faculty who are proud to call these institutions home. Please vote no on SB 83.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Kenyon

Associate Professor of Social Studies Education  
Kent State University  
Citizen of Ohio