

Testimony of Matthew Crain, PhD.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 27, 2023

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

I am an associate professor at Miami University, where I have taught for six years. I do not represent Miami, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

Higher education in Ohio has many problems that the legislature could help address. Enrollment is declining statewide. According to the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Ohio universities and community colleges have seen a 12% decrease in enrollment from Fall 2012 to Fall 2022. Meanwhile, tuition has been steadily increasing as students struggle with debt and other financial issues. State funding support is nowhere near past levels. The disruptions caused by COVID are still rippling throughout higher education as students struggle with college preparedness, mental health, and other issues. There are substantial challenges ahead.

Unfortunately, Substitute Senate Bill 83 does little to address these pressing issues. By focusing on culture war topics that have very little to do with teaching and learning, this bill politicizes higher education. In the name of intellectual diversity, the bill risks undermining the traditions of free speech in America and academic freedom at universities. Such measures are unwarranted and create a hostile environment for intellectual freedom and the productive exchange of ideas. Students cannot simply be shielded from topics and worldviews that some find uncomfortable.

Further, the bill imposes undue restrictions on collective bargaining and weakens tenure. Such measures again have little to do with teaching and learning, but will surely impede Ohio educational institutions from attracting and retaining talented faculty.

Passing Substitute Senate Bill 83 would send a clear signal that Ohio lawmakers do not support universities and wish to micromanage teachers. If these laws are passed, students and faculty will go elsewhere. Our great universities will fall further into decline.

I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote NO.

Matthew Crain