

Testimony of Alex Wolf-Root, PhD

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Representative Tom Young, Chair

November 29th, 2023

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

My name is Alex Wolf-Root, and I am a Senior Lecturer of Philosophy at The Ohio State University, working in social and political philosophy. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

As an instructor and scholar I am deeply committed to rigorous academic inquiry, very much including inquiry that pushes back against generally accepted societal views. I regularly stress on my syllabi that “we are often going to be critical of the status quo [...] not because the status quo is necessarily wrong, but rather because only through such questioning can we reasonably hope to move closer to the truth.” I had the joy of teaching and discussing issues of speech and toleration with all of my classes this semester, with one class doing a deep dive into classical liberal works from John Locke and John Stuart Mill so that the students could see the arguments from the Western canon about restrictions on government control and the benefits of speech for themselves. I say this to stress my commitment to expression and the values that you claim this bill is for, but my commitment to the value of expression and opposition to government overreach is why I’m so opposed to SB 83 and any other attempt for the government to tell us what we should or should not say, or how we should engage in inquiry.

And I say all this as someone with some deeply held views that are poorly represented on campus, a couple to the point of being viewed as ridiculous by the majority. But you know what I won’t do? I won’t tell others they can’t talk about things I find abhorrent or wrong!

I fear that the big government overreach that is SB 83 will undermine, rather than support, the noble goal of expanding rigorous academic inquiry. I strongly agree with the claimed goal of rigorous academic inquiry and the need to question many things that many in society find problematic to question, but this bill will not do that. If you want big government telling the people what they can and can’t research or teach, then SB 83 is for you. If you want rigorous academic inquiry, SB 83 is not.

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 83. Thank you for your time.