

Testimony of Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor, J.D., Ph.D.

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Rep. Tom Young, Chair

November 29, 2023

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

My name is Elizabeth Smith-Pryor, and I am a professor of American History at Kent State University, where I have taught for twenty-two years. I do not represent Kent State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

First, as a long-time faculty member of the AAUP, I am completely opposed to the bill's provision that maintains that faculty unions cannot bargain over retrenchment, evaluations, and tenure. Removing the ability to bargain over these issues essentially turns Ohio's public university faculty into at-will employees without any real job protections. This is union-busting.

Second, this bill will expose Ohio's faculty to unsubstantiated complaints about restricting "intellectual diversity" in the classroom. Faculty will spend hours responding to unsubstantiated and evidence-free complaints instead of spending those same hours preparing classes, grading assignments, and mentoring students. The quality of education will suffer in Ohio's public universities if the classroom is turned into an antagonistic environment instead of a place of engaged learning.

Similarly, I am also extremely concerned by the bill's requirements that relate to course syllabi especially the demand syllabi be made accessible online to the public. I have seen no explanation behind the requirement for doing so and fail to see any connection with the claim of promoting open intellectual inquiry. Instead, I am worried that the public posting of syllabi will lead to online harassment of instructors. I am surprised the state legislature would expose hardworking teachers to the possibility of receiving threatening and harassing emails. For the past two decades, I have been deeply committed to providing the highest quality education in all my undergraduate and graduate courses. Unfortunately, if this bill passes, and given the historical topics I teach, if I find myself subject to online harassment and trolling, I will have to reconsider whether I can afford to teach and live in a hostile environment like Ohio.

Respectfully, I ask that you reject this bill, which will only lead to real, irreversible damage to Ohio's higher education with a long-term impact on the state's ability to economically compete with states that don't undermine the integrity of valuable public goods like public colleges and universities.