

Testimony of Haidy Kamel, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 28, 2023

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit a testimony. My name is Haidy Kamel, and I am an Associate professor of Chemistry at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for twelve years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

I want to start by thanking the House Higher Education Committee for removing the prohibition on faculty strikes from the bill. However, the 11th version of the bill contains provisions that allow for broad justification for retrenchment which is equally detrimental if not more than a ban on strikes. Moreover, the bill continues to attack collective bargaining including fundamental rights of bargaining such as the right to bargain for workload and employee evaluations. Why do legislators insist on seeking to infringe on union rights? In a bill that purports to promote the free expression of all ideas, these provisions attempt to silence the voice of campus workers, especially the faculty.

Every institution of higher education has established guidelines for faculty evaluation which include regular evaluations by the dean/department chair, student evaluations, peer observations, professional development, and service to the college/university and the community. The bill maintains annual faculty evaluations with specific, weighed parameters for those evaluations. This will create a perverse incentive for faculty to avoid challenging assignments for fear that students will give them low ratings. This is especially the case in challenging areas of science such as chemistry and physics, as well as mathematics. This bill encourages instructors to lower the bar and in very little time, we will see disturbing low standards at public institutions in the State of Ohio which will translate to a high failure rate in the job market.

Senate Bill 83 is also an infringement on academic freedom in higher education institutions where the primary responsibility and mission is to search for and communicate the truth. The bill contains unclear broad language about ensuring that faculty allow students to reach their own conclusions on "controversial beliefs or policies". This language will sow confusion and fear among faculty about what they can and cannot teach and it will only steer faculty to stay clear from discussing any topic that could be labeled as "controversial". This is especially true because the bill opens faculty to unsubstantiated complaints about restricting "intellectual diversity" in their classroom. As US District Judge Mark Walker said opposing Senate Bill 7, a Floridian bill with similar provisions to SB 83: "One thing is crystal clear- both robust intellectual inquiry and democracy require light to thrive. Our professors are critical to a healthy democracy, and the state of Florida's decision to choose which viewpoints are worthy of illumination and which must remain in the shadows has implications for us all. If our "priests of democracy" are not allowed to shed light on challenging ideas, then democracy will die in darkness." This bill will muzzle college and university professors and cast us all in the dark.

I urge the Committee to not advance this bill.