

Testimony of Mark McKinney, 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 Mark McKinney, and I am a professor of French at Miami University, where I have taught since 1994. I do not represent Miami University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83. The Bill in its revised, present form is still bad for Ohio. It is bad for our students, our universities, our economy and our standing in the United States and the world. The only thing the bill *appears* to be good for is the partisan politics of those who have proposed it. However, if the bill is passed, it will prove to be bad even for that, because of the permanent damage that it will do to higher education in Ohio, and to many related aspects of our state's economic activity and social life. If the bill is passed, Ohioans will remember who did the damage and will make that clear in the election booth. Here are some specific ways in which Substitute Senate Bill 83, if passed, would be bad for Ohio:

1. Sections 3345.0217 and 3345.0218: these sections are designed to stifle free debate and intellectual inquiry into important aspects of human experience, social life, the physical environment, economic activity, and political thought. If these provisions were to become law, they would make our classrooms very sterile. They would eliminate the possibility for healthy classroom debate about the most pressing issues of our times. If they were to go into effect, that would send a strong signal to potential students and to educators in Ohio and beyond, that there is no point in studying, teaching or conducting research at universities in Ohio, because vigorous intellectual inquiry has been outlawed by the state legislature.

2. Sections 3345.451 through 3345.453: these sections would impose a form of faculty evaluation that is unnecessary insofar as we are already evaluated in multiple ways every year, through student evaluations, by university management, and various forms of peer review. Moreover, the provisions of these sections are highly pernicious. They are obviously designed to eliminate the tenure protections that are absolutely necessary to protect the unfettered pursuit of knowledge in and through higher education. Under the pretence of setting up an evaluation system, these sections of the bill are meant to institute, in effect, a form of political control over teaching and research that would eviscerate higher education in Ohio.

3. Sections 3345.454 through 3345.456: provisions in these sections regarding tenure and retrenchment are designed to disempower faculty and strip job protections from us. They are explicitly anti-labor, including by taking away from faculty unions the ability to bargain over the firing of faculty employees, the elimination of programs and departments, and so on. Labor unions in Ohio will view these anti-union provisions as an attack on employee and union rights, and as setting a very bad precedent for all employees and unions across the state.

These are just some of the most egregious problems with Substitute Senate Bill 83. In fact, there is little to nothing in the bill as it stands that would strengthen higher education in Ohio. Instead, the bill is designed to cause great damage to our university system.