



**Opponent Testimony — Senate Bill 83
House Higher Education Committee**

Rachel Coyle, Honesty for Ohio Education Coalition

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony against Senate Bill 83. My name is Rachel Coyle. I am testifying as a member of the [Honesty for Ohio Education Coalition](#).

[Honesty](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [60](#) organizational partners, as well as thousands of students, educators, and Ohioans who believe every student deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in facts and diverse perspectives.

As a coalition, we believe that education must reflect and celebrate all identities, lived experiences, and cultures in order to maximize student engagement and achievement. We believe that ignoring discrimination — or minimizing its long-term negative impacts — irrevocably harms individuals and communities, while also preventing pathways to healing and growth. We wholly believe that honest education is rooted in facts, science, and quantifiable data. In addition, it fosters the critical thinking skills and exchange of ideas necessary for a vibrant economy and a high-functioning, multiracial democracy.

This is why we staunchly oppose Senate Bill 83 and similar legislative attempts to compromise honest education, muzzle academic freedom, and dictate the spaces we hold based on our identities. The re-introduction of these censorship measures across multiple legislative sessions is an unjustifiable waste of taxpayer time, money, and resources.

Senate Bill 83 is not from Ohio, for Ohio, nor does it improve Ohio. These types of bills are politically motivated efforts drafted by outside interests who do not have students in our schools. They do not live in our local communities. They are exclusively interested in micromanaging, manipulating, and defining what and how tuition-paying students can learn, what and how trained faculty can teach, and whether or not workers can advocate for safe and fair learning conditions.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education¹, 40 similar efforts have been introduced in 22 states across the country, illustrating just how wide-ranging and unoriginal these copycat censorship efforts are. Thankfully, at least 29 of these bills have been tabled or rejected by legislatures that value honest education and academic freedom.

Here in Ohio, SB 83 weakens academic freedom while claiming to strengthen it by forcing a political narrative about “intellectual diversity” on faculty and administrators. Rather than cultivating learning environments that speak accurately about complicated aspects of our shared history, modern realities, and complex systems of power, Senate Bill 83 seeks to whitewash history, portray uncomfortable facts as debates with two sides, sanitize hate, and reduce our lived experiences around race and identity to “controversial beliefs or policies.”

Meanwhile, the bill’s vague language and threats of disciplinary measures will cast a chilling effect on education², creating a climate of fear and intimidation on campuses. At its core, Senate Bill 83 is a retread of failed educational gag orders from the 134th General Assembly that Ohioans did not want.

SB 83’s broad language restricting required diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and race and gender-based policies demonstrates a gaping cultural blind spot and insensitivity to the safety, community, and sense of belonging these policies provide. Such provisions will have a devastating impact on the college experience by targeting affinity spaces, as well as race and gender-based majors. Ironically, the DEI training and programs this bill seeks to ban are exactly what’s needed to move this bill from culturally incompetent to culturally proficient.

Further illustrating the cultural incompetency and overt racism of this “Enhancement” act is SB 83’s effort to ban and restrict academic relationships with China. This provision doubles down on targeted hate and violence against Asian American and Pacific Islanders, likely adding to the record surge of hate crimes inflicted on AAPI communities during the pandemic, as reported by the US Dept of Justice. ³

Not only does this provision proliferate violent Sinophobia, it also prevents invaluable cross-cultural learning opportunities and important global research. This ban would diminish the quality of our higher learning and put our academic institutions at a significant disadvantage to out-of-state schools that value international relationships, forcing our students, families, and educators to leave the state and adding to the brain drain already occurring in Ohio.

As a broad coalition, we are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with thousands of Ohioans who are boldly opposing Senate Bill 83 with phone calls, emails, meetings, town halls, rallies,

¹ Chronicle of Higher Education, “DEI Legislation Tracker.” <https://bit.ly/41Av6S3>.

² Washington Post. “Ron DeSantis shows how not to run an education system.” February 28, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/28/desantis-florida-school-performance/>

³ Department of Justice. “Raising Awareness of Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” <https://www.justice.gov/file/1507346/download>

op-eds, letters to the editor, testimony, and grassroots community organizing to condemn this censorship. The lives and identities of our families and neighbors are not controversial topics, nor are they political currency for elected legislators to spend advancing a national extremist agenda.

We urge the House Higher Education Committee to reject Senate Bill 83 and help us build an Ohio that we are ALL proud to call home.

SB 83 is bad for students, bad for higher education, and bad for Ohio.

Thank you.