

Testimony of Caitlin A. Kane, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 27, 2023

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

My name is Caitlin Kane, and I am a professor of Theatre History and Dramatic Criticism at Kent State University. I do not represent Kent State but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

While some improvements have been made in this version of the bill, it will still result in a significant limitation of academic freedom on campus due to the vague definitions provided for “controversial belief or policy” and the lack of clarity about what would constitute appropriate respect for “intellectual diversity.” I am also concerned about whose “intellectual diversity” is being protected – it seems that less attention is being given to protecting BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled students, staff, and faculty than those who would like to deny our place in history and contemporary society.

Additionally, the requirement that detailed course syllabi be made publicly available would encourage outside individuals to harass faculty teaching supposedly unpopular and/or controversial content. We have already seen instances across the country of violence and threats of violence against faculty and staff for their supposed beliefs (often with little evidence of said beliefs besides a single person’s (mis)reading of a document like a course syllabus). Given the current state of our political climate, enforcing this policy will put faculty, and sometimes the students whom we teach, at risk for bodily harm and will do little to achieve the bill’s ostensible aims.

As a second-year faculty member, the passing of this legislation would directly affect my willingness to stay at Kent State and in Ohio. This bill’s threat to academic freedom, union rights, job protections – particularly its exclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression from essential employment protections – and quality education will make it far less likely that I – and colleagues who are similarly trained and positioned – will build careers here.

Please do not pass this bill. It will result in talented students, staff, and faculty leaving the state and a decrease in the quality of education offered to students who remain here.

Sincerely,

Caitlin A. Kane, Ph.D.