

Testimony of Dr. Jennifer Suchland

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:

My name is Jennifer Suchland, and I am an associate professor of Slavic and East European Language and Cultures and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University. I have taught at OSU and lived in Columbus for the past fifteen years. Today, I do not represent OSU, rather, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

I am opposed to Senate Bill 83 because there is nothing in the bill that enhances higher education, neither for students or for education professionals. The bill targets faculty and faculty unions as if we are pariahs of the state instead of well trained, committed, and respected professionals. Why, I wonder, does the committee focus on protocols regarding syllabi and instructor evaluations when universities already have such protocols which are tied to accreditation? Why would the committee exert such time and effort drafting and revising (eleven times) a bill to restrict faculty unions from bargaining over retrenchment, evaluations, and tenure? It appears that Senate Bill 83 is fighting faculty when we are not even at battle with you, or anyone.

I fear that there is unwarranted suspicion and even disrespect behind Senate Bill 83. I'd like to remind you that we, the professionals of higher education of Ohio, are very busy doing our very best to do our job. There are a total of **662,403 students** enrolled in Ohio colleges including 573,536 undergraduate and 88,867 graduate school students during the 2022-2023 academic year. We need legislation focused on the real concerns we have for the future of higher education. I oppose Senate Bill 83 and ask that you turn to meaningful issues.

For example:

- (1) The pandemic revealed and exacerbated a learning crisis in the United States. We need to focus our energies on increasing access to higher education, reducing student debt, and developing ever more accessible modes of teaching and learning.
- (2) We need to address the challenges and opportunities that new technologies (such as AI) pose to higher education. How can universities lead, rather than just respond to,

technological innovations? We have a responsibility to slow down technologies to ensure that we wrestle with the ethical questions they pose.

- (3) Ohio needs to increase state funding for higher education or students will stop attending our schools. According to the National Education Association, 32 states (including Ohio) spent less on public colleges and universities in 2020 than in 2008. As a result, students are borrowing more or not attending school in Ohio.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Suchland