

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and esteemed members of the House Higher Education Committee, I express my concerns regarding SB83, a matter that is deeply intertwined with a broader issue exemplified by the recently passed SB117.

While recognizing the purported noble intention of fostering "intellectual diversity," SB117 demonstrated the pitfalls of legislative meddling within our educational institutions. This bill utilized the full powers of the General Assembly to impose state-mandated centers on multiple public universities across Ohio. The initial bill called for the imposition of these state-mandated partisan thought centers on the campuses of both The Ohio State University and The University of Toledo. For weeks students and professors from these two universities gathered to give their point of views and stand against state-imposed partisan encroachment into spaces of higher education. Yet even after weeks of public dismay against this legislation, as well as others such as SB83 this summer, this body opted to sneak SB117 through the budget process. And to make matters worse this body, at the last minute, behind closed doors, sought to add three more public universities to the list. This denied the students and professors of Miami University, Cleveland State University, and University of Cincinnati the right to have their voices heard. Approaches such as these continue to raise serious questions about the potential of the purposeful politicization of higher education in Ohio from legislators. These instances showcase the performative nature of democracy in Ohio where residents don't even get due diligence from their own supposed representatives on matters that directly affect them.

Now, as we deliberate on SB83, it is crucial to learn from the recent past. SB83 proposes measures that continue to seek to stake out precedent for the General Assembly, along with its partisan actors, to continue wielding significant influence over speech within public universities. The idea of legislators using their powers to regulate speech on campuses is inherently concerning. The imposition of specific guidelines and restrictions risks compromising the very essence of academic freedom, turning our institutions of higher learning into arenas where partisan preferences are enforced rather than genuine intellectual diversity is fostered. Furthermore, it is evident that similar legislation, like SB83, with its vague language, creates an atmosphere where individuals, both students, and professors, feel compelled to engage in self-censorship to avoid running afoul of the ambiguous restrictions. The chilling effect is clear, indicating that the intent of such legislation may be to stifle open discourse and limit the free expression of ideas within our academic institutions.

Legislative overreach, as exemplified by SB117 and now echoed in SB83, undermines the autonomy of universities and the expertise of their faculty. Rather than encouraging open dialogue and diverse perspectives, these measures create an atmosphere of external control and potential suppression of free expression.

I urge this committee to reflect on the broader implications of such legislative actions. The General Assembly's formidable powers should not be wielded as tools to enforce partisan preferences or restrict speech within our public universities. Let us preserve the academic freedom that forms the bedrock of our educational institutions and avoid the pitfalls of legislative overreach. I strongly advocate for a reconsideration of SB83, ensuring that our universities

remain bastions of free thought and diverse discourse, free from undue state-imposed partisan interference.