

In opposition to SB83

House Committee on Higher Education

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

I am writing with deep concern in regard to the Ohio Legislature’s Senate Bill 83, the so-called “Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act”. This bill restricts the educational practices used to protect marginalized students at universities, while making instructors vulnerable to political attack – through retrenchment – and vaguely written provisions against “indoctrination”. In academia, this will protect the denial of history and science in the classroom; potentially platforming false information, and perpetuating dangerous ideologies . It sends the message that every “opinion” must be given equal platform in Ohio academics. No matter how false or bigoted, and no matter the consequences for marginalized students. Therefore, I’m asking for your full opposition to this bill.

In the interest of our health and safety, students demand anti-discriminatory education for students and teachers on our campuses. But SB83 restricts the use of mandatory training related to diversity, equity, or inclusion in public universities. Proponents of the bill construe these programs as a form of ‘indoctrination’. In reality – diversity, equity, and inclusion are principles of anti-discrimination – and are instrumental in protecting the health and safety of marginalized students. To restrict these programs is to send a clear message of indifference towards the discrimination students face, and denies their fundamental right to safety.

Ohio students also demand honesty in our education. SB83 – however – protects history and science denial from academic scrutiny. The bill orders that faculty “allow and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about ALL controversial beliefs or policies” (Sub. S. B. No. 83, 767-769). Any attempt by instructors to push against these ideas could be considered “[indoctrinating] social, political or religious point of view”, which this section strictly prohibits (Sub. S. B. No. 83, lines 769-770). It could, for example, be against the law’s provisions for an instructor to grade accordingly if a student denies the Holocaust in an academic paper. The student could claim that the teacher ‘didn’t let them come to their own conclusion’ on this ‘controversial topic’, and potentially cause that teacher to lose their job.

This is not to mention the bill's absurd new administrative requirements, such as having universities specially identify expenditures that might be related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Nor that the bill prohibits any consideration of one's (potentially dangerous) ideologies in the hiring or admissions process. It's clear that the purpose of this bill is to exert political control over public universities; to deny students the right to inclusive environments, and to ensure that purveyors of hate have an absolute right to violent speech. I passionately urge you not to support this bill under any circumstances.

Sincerely,
Rag Banerjee.