



## TESTIMONY ON HIGHER EDUCATION ENHANCEMENT

Ohio House Higher Education Committee

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Opportunity Solutions Project

Chairman Young and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 83. My name is Meredith Freedhoff, and I am testifying on behalf of Opportunity Solutions Project. OSP is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization that seeks to enhance individuals' paths to self-sufficiency.

There are over 460,000 students enrolled in Ohio's colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> Across the country, students and faculty have been thrown into an education crisis, driven by activists and bureaucrats, that will have a permanent impact on their future success.

SB 83 has several reforms, but it simply seeks to strengthen higher education in the state. Today, I'd like to focus on just a few of them. The bill ensures no student or faculty member can be compelled to profess discriminatory ideas. It also makes sure that higher education institutions do not discriminate, whether in hiring or admissions, based on an individual's political or ideological viewpoints. It does not ban the discussion of race, American history, or inequality. It targets the compelling of individuals to profess beliefs that run contrary to their convictions and protects their right to be treated equally under the law.

We fail our students when we force them to accept viewpoints without rigorous intellectual discourse. We ought to base education on inquiry, not indoctrination.

At OSP, we believe a public education system works best when it prepares students for the workforce and mature civic life. In other words, the classroom is a place of truth-seeking, not a factory to create political activists. Education shouldn't be about making choices for someone—it should be about empowering students to make the best choices for themselves.

### **What this bill does for Ohio's students, faculty, and higher education system**

SB 83 accomplishes several things to strengthen Ohio's higher education system. It gets radical diversity, equity, and inclusion programming out of higher education; it ensures faculty hiring and student admissions are based on merit and achievement; and it protects students and faculty from unjust discrimination. I want to focus on just two critical components of this legislation today.

*DEI:* This bill requires the board of trustees at each institution to prohibit mandatory training and programming for students and faculty on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and other controversial viewpoints. It does not prohibit discussion of controversial topics. Instead, it prohibits compelling students and faculty to accept controversial political or social views. It reaffirms each institution's commitment to discovery and intellectual curiosity that are foundational to a fruitful education. SB 83 protects academic freedom and civil rights.

*Hiring and Admissions:* This bill also prohibits any type of political or ideological tests for faculty hiring or student admissions. This reform ensures political and ideological discrimination, so rampant in higher education, have no place in Ohio's colleges and universities.

### **Why Ohio should pass these reforms**

Every individual has the freedom and fundamental right to pursue happiness and be rewarded for their hard work—the American Dream. That right should not be threatened by political activists who seek to divide our county.

In his concurrence with *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, Justice Clarence Thomas said: "Individuals are the sum of their unique experiences, challenges, and accomplishments. What matters is not the barriers they face, but how they choose to confront them."<sup>2</sup>

You have a great opportunity here to help lead the way by ensuring no student or faculty member is discriminated against based on race, sex, or their political views—protecting civil rights in Ohio both today and for years to come.

Thank you for your time today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Henry, “Ohio higher education enrollment drops 12% over decade,” Ohio Capital Journal (2023), <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/04/17/ohio-higher-education-enrollment-drops-12-over-decade/#:~:text=By%3A%20Megan%20Henry%20%2D%20April%2017%2C%202023%204%3A5%20am&text=Ohio%20public%20institutions%20of%20higher,too%20worried%20about%20enrollment%20decline>.

<sup>2</sup> *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 600 U.S. 181 (2023) (Thomas, C. concurring), [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199\\_hgdj.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf).