

**Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act
Higher Education Committee
Sen. Cirino, sponsor
Wednesday November 29, 2023**

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Chairman Young, Senator Cirino, and members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony. I speak for myself and am not here as a representative of the University, but as a patriot who loves researching and teaching Early American history. I'm here to express concern at the censorship this bill embodies and the threat to our public university system it represents.

SB 83 and HB 151 are not about Ohio. These bills are the product of outside political think tanks and similar legislation has appeared in 17 other states. The bills identify faculty political beliefs as a problem that needs to be legislated against, which is censorship. These bills presume that faculty act in bad faith, and that introducing students to new research and facts they are not familiar with is a form of bias. In reality, we care deeply about our students and do our best to create respectful classroom environments. The vast majority of student testimony has opposed both bills.

Many of the requirements of SB 83 are redundant and seem designed to intimidate faculty and expose them to harassment and even firing. Syllabi are already published for students, and we have established channels for student complaints. Students already evaluate courses, and departments take these evaluations seriously. Eligibility for raises is tied to annual reviews. It's hard to see how conservatives will be attracted to jobs at Ohio universities under the contingent and bureaucracy-laden working conditions that would be created by SB 83's provisions.

SB 83 defines certain subjects as controversial—and bans them from the classroom. This is censorship. Censoring subjects related to policy is damaging both to good public policy and to good teaching. How can we teach about citizenship without discussing voting, a banned subject? The opening prayer at the First Continental Congress in 1774 was controversial. The Constitution was controversial in 1787. Our state constitution took the vote away from Black Ohioans at the moment of statehood and didn't restore it unconditionally until the 20th century. Shouldn't students and elected officials be aware of these histories as they consider present-day debates? All these stories—controversial and not—are part of America's complex past and present.

I am grateful that the legislature thinks American history is important. I became a professor because I fell in love with the American Revolution in a college classroom. We know more about the Revolution than we did when I was a college student because of all the research that faculty at universities like Ohio State do. Yes, History classes are different now than they were forty

years ago, but that is true of biology, computer science, and most other disciplines because of new knowledge.

Finally, the revised version of this bill includes language that gives the Board of Trustees sweeping powers to fire faculty in the name of “retrenchment,” “mission” and cost savings. This, also, is a trend we see in other state systems that are gutting Arts and Sciences programs even as they pay administrators exorbitant salaries and bonuses. The mission of the university is teaching and research. Arts and Sciences faculty teach the bulk of OSU students at an extremely high ROI. Humanities are not a “boutique” subjects, but integral to many other professions. To take one example, humanities majors have the highest rate of admission to medical school (over 50%)—higher even than the biological sciences.

If you break our public university system, you’ll be breaking something precious and valuable to Ohioans, something that is hard to put back together. Our students in all majors—whether artists, neuroscientists, or philosophers—deserve the best and most accomplished faculty who are leading researchers in their fields, regardless of politics.