

**Testimony to Ohio Workforce and Higher Education Committee,  
March 29, 2023. Peter W. Wood, President, National Association of  
Scholars**

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Rulli, and Ranking Member Ingram:

My name is Peter Wood and I am the President of the National Association of Scholars. NAS is a network of scholars and citizens united by our commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in higher education. We have more than thirty-five years of experience in advocating for the principles of intellectual freedom.

The National Association of Scholars enthusiastically endorses [Senate Bill 83](#), the Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act. SB 83 will do an extraordinary amount to depoliticize Ohio's public higher education system, strengthen intellectual diversity, and restore its accountability to Ohio policymakers and citizens. We hope that it will swiftly become law. SB 83 offers wonderfully comprehensive improvement of Ohio's higher education. Its catalogue of reforms includes requirements that colleges

and universities receiving state funds commit themselves to free speech and intellectual diversity, and to prohibiting both “diversity statements” and the imposition by **required** courses or training of “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” SB 83 prohibits “ideological litmus tests in hiring and promotion” in state institutions of higher education”—a step that should be welcomed by the people of Ohio across the political spectrum because ideological litmus tests are the enemy of good education and intellectual and scientific achievement and because such tests are always waiting at the door ready to slip in disguised as wholesome principles. Keeping them out requires vigilance and SB summons the colleges and universities to pay attention where it is needed.

SB 83 also adds requirements for reforming mission statements, making college syllabi accessible to the public, and bringing the details of college and university budgets into the light. Some of SB 83’s proposed reforms might not have occurred to the casual observer of higher education but become compelling the moment one looks seriously at what happens on campus. Thus the bill calls for transparency about speaker fees, which all

too often have become a way to channel public funds to leaders of political causes favored by college faculty or administrators. The bill also calls for new American history and government general education requirements, and prohibits financial entanglements with the People's Republic of China—a matter which my organization first blew the whistle almost a decade ago and which continues to pose a deeply troubling problem, as the PRC exploits its friendly welcome on American campuses to acquire illegal access to tax-payer funded research and strategic technologies. Our universities properly prize intellectual openness but this leaves us vulnerable to the theft of intellectual property. China is not the only bad actor but it is far and away the most successful.

SB 83 requires that Ohio's public universities annually report how well they have fulfilled these requirements, and requirements that universities institute sanctions for noncompliance. The NAS supports each of these reforms as excellent and necessary means to restore intellectual freedom to Ohio's colleges.

There is more to SB 83 than I can talk about in my time before the committee but let me add one more important observation. The bill rightly and powerfully emphasizes the role of college trustees and to that end puts in place the kind of training that will ensure they can carry out their responsibilities with in-depth understanding of the complex institutions they oversee. Thus SB 83 offers a restoration of public oversight to public higher education.

Rather than focus on the details of the bill, I would like to speak more generally on two topics. **Is SB 83 necessary?** And is it **tailored to accomplish its goal without unintended consequences?**

SB83 is absolutely necessary. As president of NAS for the last fifteen years, and a professor and university administrator for the previous twenty years, I have seen intellectual freedom dwindle nationwide, until it is an empty shell on most college campuses. Colleges and universities almost all proclaim their commitment to academic freedom. They have formal statements in their faculty handbooks and they tell their students too that they are intellectually free. And college leaders can be eloquent in their

defense of this principle. But they don't mean it. We see that in the effective prohibition of debate on contentious topics and in what is now called compelled speech. And we see it when college authorities turn a blind eye to the bullying and shoutdowns that so often foreclose expression of disfavored views.

This problem certainly extends to Ohio's universities. My colleague John Sailer has [written extensively](#) about how so-called "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" bureaucrats at Ohio State University have used diversity statements and other administrative means to prevent all dissenters from radical orthodoxy from getting hired—even in fields such as nuclear engineering.

Ohio's universities are no longer capable of reforming themselves to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom. Ohio can only restore its universities to the pursuit of truth, instead of the pursuit of indoctrination, if state policymakers pass a comprehensive reform bill such as SB 83.

**SB83 is well tailored to accomplish its goal without unintended consequences.** It is comprehensive, detailed, but with carefully drafted language. SB 83, for example, does not *prohibit* “diversity, equity, and inclusion courses or training for students, staff, or faculty”; rather, it specifies that the universities may not *require* them. SB 83 uses such precise language throughout, to ensure that it champions liberty in Ohio’s universities, and does not accidentally infringe upon the principles or the practice of intellectual freedom.

The National Association of Scholars heartily endorses SB 83, and we urge Ohio’s legislators to pass this bill and Governor DeWine to sign it.