

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Kathleen Kollman, Ph.D. I am a professor at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). I am submitting my testimony today as a private citizen, however, not on behalf of my university or any entity other than myself. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Before I begin, it's important to me to note that I am not able to testify in person because on the afternoon of the hearing, I will be teaching a course, holding office hours, and attending a faculty meeting—duties associated with my job, which I take extremely seriously and care a great deal about. I am an alumna of three excellent universities in Ohio and have worked for five institutions here over the course of my twenty-year career in higher education. This is my home state, and one thing I have always been proud of about being an Ohioan is our top-notch institutions of higher education. However, this bill threatens to weaken that educational reputation by damaging our graduates' employment opportunities and silencing faculty members' academic freedom.

Mandates and bans are never conducive to free expression, speech, or thought, which the bill claims to be trying to preserve and encourage. However, the bill's language is vague enough that the consequences of some of the sections of it threaten to end the jobs of many faculty and staff, cancel entire programs, and make those employees and programs that remain have to walk on eggshells to ensure they are not violating the supposed balance of ideas the bill alludes to. I already run my classroom in such a way that debate, discussion, and opposing ideas are welcome; I do not need that mandated to me. Furthermore, by making academic employee strikes illegal, you are taking away one area of their free speech. All in all, it appears that the bill's entire point is to reduce the freedom of speech of employees and faculty while simultaneously turning students into law enforcers tasked with catching faculty in the act of teaching anything with which they personally disagree.

Education is built on the free exchange of ideas. This bill's purpose appears to be to quash that exchange entirely.

One question I have considered as I read through the entire bill is whether I would have gone into higher education in Ohio at all if this bill existed when I was just beginning my career. The answer to that is a resounding no. I would have chosen different universities to attend as a student completely out of state. I would have chosen different colleges and universities to work for, also out of state. I would have encouraged my family members and friends to avoid going to institutions and would have urged them to send

their children out of Ohio for college, too. Going forward, if this bill passes, I will be hard pressed to remain in Ohio for the rest of my academic career and would likely leave, taking the purchasing dollars of my family with me. I am sure I am not the only higher education professional who feels this way and would likely exit the state if this bill comes to fruition.

If what you want is for experienced, ethical, caring, and well-educated faculty to leave the state of Ohio en masse, that is likely what you will get if you pass this bill into law. Furthermore, students will opt out of studying here, businesses will recognize the “brain drain” going on in our state, and accreditors for both higher education and various specific industries will find Ohio’s higher education curricula lacking. Businesses want to hire graduates who are trained in real-world issues that help them communicate globally, and that includes receiving training in diversity-related issues. Many industries require graduates to receive specific coursework in order to be certified or sit for professional and licensure exams. The bill is worded in such a way as to encourage institutions to take away the very courses that students actually need for their careers.

I love Ohio. I don’t want to leave. I want to continue teaching at my current institution in my current disciplines and keep the status quo. I do not prevent students from disagreeing with course material, nor do I “indoctrinate” them. The abject fear-mongering of this bill demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what goes on in college classrooms today and appears to be nothing more than a form of bullying and censorship against subject matter that is seen as ideologically divergent from the party in control of both houses of the Ohio legislature. That could not be further from the truth. But I do think it is ironic that the Ohio Republican party thinks banning diversity education is in alignment with their values, as that means this party does not think inclusion is a value they uphold. Ohio is racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. It is a state with LGBTQ+ voters, voters from all genders, age ranges, and backgrounds. If you want to alienate and tell these voters that their identities don’t matter and should not be represented in educational curriculum, that is what you will be doing if this bill passes into law: reinforcing the idea that some citizens are not welcome in this state. My goal as an Ohio educator is to be my students’ ally and tell them that they do matter and are important, valued, and respected members of the state’s citizenry.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful and dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.