

Dear 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 in writing. My name is Dr. Melissa Foster. I am a senior lecturer in The School of Communication at The Ohio State University, and I study media effects. I am writing to share my views and expertise as an individual, not as a representative of the university.

I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House. I have several serious concerns based on my experience working in the social sciences for over two decades. In general, legislation that aims to overregulate academia can have negative effects on education. In this case, I'm particularly concerned about misunderstandings regarding higher education in the social sciences, misguided assessments that could harm individual people as well as the university, and dangerous labor regulations.

Some individuals who do not work in higher education seem to be concerned about a liberal bias in academia. I want to share some information about one of my classes that I believe will assuage such concerns. I teach a class called "Media and Citizenship". This class aims to help students learn to utilize media in ways that promote informed, active, and responsible citizenship. The course has 13 modules, each with a different topic. Some of these topics can be considered "controversial" such as media censorship and regulation of big tech companies. For each module, students watch lecture videos, take a quiz on the lecture content, and create a discussion post to share with other students. In those discussion posts, students are asked to combine information from lectures, peer-reviewed research, and professional journalism to explore the topic of the module. Students can share any opinion they'd like about the topic. For

example, some students support regulating social media companies at a federal level and some students do not. *Grades are not related to what the students' opinions are. However, their grades are based on their support for their opinions.* Rather than sharing their individual thoughts and emotions, students seek out evidence on the topic. Being able to articulate a position and support it with evidence is a valuable life skill. Students also share their work with other students so that they can see a variety of perspectives and sources. In this way, we cover “controversial” topics in a way that maintains civility while also allowing students to explore topics of interest and communicate information with others. I do not believe that my class is unique in this objective. Many courses allow for a variety of perspectives with an overarching goal of providing evidence-based information.

Aside from over-regulating courses that are already working well, I’m concerned about the addition of more student evaluations of instruction. Students are simply not qualified to judge if a professor’s class is free from political bias. Not only are students not qualified to do this, relying on such input can be actively harmful. For a summary of some of those harms, please see an article I wrote for a peer-reviewed journal [HERE](#). Evaluation of instruction should be reserved for people who study education and are qualified to evaluate work.

One of the reason proponents would like to eliminate instructors’ abilities to negotiate for fair wages and working conditions is that students pay for tuition in advance of a semester. However, I want to share that instructors are not paid in advance for their work. So, the undue burden on instructors has the potential to significantly harm recruitment and retention of highly qualified individuals to Ohio universities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. If you have questions about my research or classes (or would like a copy of class syllabi), I can be reached at foster.1182@osu.edu.