

Testimony of Dr. Bernadette “bird” Bowen, Media & Communication PhD, Visiting Assistant Professor, Content Creator, and Critical Media Ecologist Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
April 19th, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Bernadette “bird” Bowen, and I am a professor of Media, Journalism & Film at Miami University, as well as an advocacy-oriented content creator, poet, and critical media ecologist. I’ve lived in Ohio since 2018, when I moved here to pursue my PhD in Media & Communication at Bowling Green State University. I do not represent either institution, but am rather here to submit my testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

As a media and communication scholar and human, if had to narrow down my lifetime to only four lessons, they would be as follows: the language that we use builds our worlds. We only know what we know. Everything becomes normal in repetition. And everything is connected.

Today, I urge you to consider what these four phrases reveal about Ohio SB 83, specifically.

Everything we learn is dependent upon what came before us. We only know what we know.

What I mean is, pick anything in this room. I assure you that it was built using language as a blueprint. A language that humans with power made and controlled. In that way, language is like institutions. Institutions are also human made. And, as my research documents, U.S. institutions were built by one demographic of white, “land-owning”, cismale humans who used language to build upon preexisting Abrahamic religious institutions. For those of you who don’t know, these white cismen built the first universities inside their churches. Their choices made education exclusive and inequitable, by design. And others legal choices justified them.

Long before the internet, when illiteracy was common, legislators could get away with this.

Much like SB 83, their actions had little to do with intention, and everything to do with impact.

If instructors are not allowed to talk about the foundation of this nation, we cannot do our jobs. And, if you pass this bill, it will be abundantly clear to us, that that is what you want.

The language institutions use influences who citizens are allowed to become throughout their lifetimes. And I’m sure I’m preaching to the choir here, to those who’s entire responsibility it is to create language that is supposed to represent us all, and justly dictate how we all can live. You already know that we only what we know, and everything becomes normal in repetition.

If SB 83 passes, educational freedom would be under threat in Ohio. It would open the door to repeated bills being passed to ensure that more unjust bills become normal in repetition.

For instance, a main finding of my critical media ecological work is that: due to legislative decisions that have, and continue to, blockade funding for comprehensive sex education (CSE) in this country, most everyone here has been sexually miseducated, including most of our legislators. And this is one of the major issues of our age, being that The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (2020) reported on their website that CSE has been shown to increase bodily knowledge and decrease rates of sexual violences.

Therefore, this is just one example of how because numerous legislators have chosen to blockade CSE, their actions mediate disinformation and miseducation, that inclines otherwise preventable violences. And, since everything is connected, sexually miseducated legislators then go on to pass Targeted Restrictions on Abortion Provider (TRAP) laws, which set the precedent to overturn *Roe v Wade*. If you pass SB 83 here in Ohio, it will add to these harms. Miseducation about, really, any topic leads us to hurt ourselves and each other in confusion.

If you vote to support SB 83, the impact of your action is a mutilation of students' complete knowledge of the past and present, ensuring that all future Ohioans would be disinformed.

Legislative decisions like this do not simply influence the lives of students, staff, and faculty.

Each proposed and approved bill is a form of media, that when introduced into any one state influences the way all state and national relations exist because -- everything is connected.

This is a big part of why I love teaching public speaking because we are alive during the first lifetime where the average person has the ability to speak their mind and be heard, globally.

Language, like legislation, is a human choice. Choices we make build our worlds. We only know what we know. Everything becomes normal in repetition. And everything is connected.

You know, if you pass SB 83, it would be you choosing to reinforce foundational inequities built into this nation as features, using legislative language that makes learning exclusive.

This legislative body still has a choice to decide how it wants to be remembered. And, rest assured, if you support SB 83, you will go down in history as taking a page from the nazi playbook because anyone who knows history knows that "first they came for the teachers".

This isn't the world that existed before the Internet. We will not forget the choices you make.

## References

The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. (2020). *Sex education as sexual assault prevention*. SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change. <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/If-Then-Sexual-Assault-Final.pdf>