

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

My name is Enrico Bonello, and I am a professor of Plant Pathology at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for 23 years and do research on issues related to forest health, particularly under the effects of climate change, which is an eminently non-controversial topic (and not a “belief”, as defined in the bill) among specialists like me, i.e. people who know what they talk about. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

The bill as written is a set of solutions in search of non-existing problems. None of the “issues” the bill purports to correct actually exist in real life. Due to time constraints, I cannot address all of them, or even a sub-set. So I will focus on what Mr. Cirino summarized, in his OpEd in the Columbus Dispatch of April 4, 2023, as “Our First Amendment is under assault in academia.” Mr. Cirino did not provide any hard evidence for such statement. I have been at different premiere institutions in the US for almost 30 years, and no institution I have been a part of has ever “forbidden,” by *fiat*, any point of view or any speaker from speaking on campus. Therefore, in the absence of irrefutable evidence, I submit to you that this is a malicious lie meant to foment division where no division exists.

Mr. Cirino seeks to correct this non-existing problem by, for example, prescribing that each institution adopts a policy that requires the institution to “Affirm and guarantee that the institution will seek out intellectual diversity in invited speakers.” I suspect that what Mr. Cirino has in mind is that so-called conservative voices are sometimes not welcome by university “communities.” This, of course, is different from being “prevented” to talk by the institution itself, which, as I said, does not occur. Instead, Mr. Cirino seeks to FORCE certain viewpoints even when they are not welcome. So a better question may be: Why are certain viewpoints not welcome, for example when such viewpoints claim that climate change is simply a hoax or that global warming is a thing but is not caused by humans?

Let me try to answer that question. Universities are by design a place for free inquiry using sophisticated thinking based on empirical evidence. Whether it is the hard sciences, or the humanities, faculty and students are trained to use the logic of induction and deduction, based on empirical evidence, to come to their own conclusions. For this reason, the vast majority of faculty and students on campuses across the nation do not welcome certain messages expounded by certain so-called conservatives. Mind you, it’s not that the speakers are “prevented” by the institutions themselves to speak on campus. You simply cannot force communities of learners, as you find on university campuses, to accept viewpoints that do not conform with the logic of induction and deduction based on empirical evidence. Many of the so-called conservative viewpoints Mr. Cirino wants to force on campus are simply nonsensical, fact-free “thinking”, or beliefs with respect to science or any other field of knowledge, i.e. they do not conform with rigorous inductive and deductive thinking. Of course, one can still express nonsense, as allowed by the first amendment, but that person cannot expect to be paid attention to. Does that mean there is no intellectual diversity on campuses across the Nation? Of course not.

This is just a smidgen of the reasons this bill is so bad for Ohio. It's based on falsity surrounding non-existing problems and is designed to divide. The Dispatch OpEd by Mr. Cirino is illuminating, as he did not miss an opportunity to state that this bill is trying to correct "woke this" and "woke that". Those are dog whistles to try and capture votes, not honest discourse.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this extremely harmful and dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.