

April 19, 2023

Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 83

Chair Cirino and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to Senate Bill 83. My name is Catherine Less, and I am a third-year student at the Ohio State University studying Political Science and Public Policy. I am here today to oppose Senate Bill 83, which would mandate a complete overhaul of higher education while banning crucial diversity, equity, and inclusionary training that ensures all students no matter their background can succeed. While you seek to establish classrooms that bolster intellectual diversity, you simultaneously undermine all of that by dictating the content and manner in which topics can be discussed. Senate Bill 83 is an orchestrated wave of attacks against ethnic and gender studies that will have a horrifying effect on learning in higher education.

A core component of my major as a political science student relies heavily on the ability to have constructive academic conversations that challenge my own opinions in the classroom. In my experience, by creating a space of discussion to debate and consider different political views has never led to a moment of alienation but rather a space trying to educate while at the same time being educated by my peers. Challenging but necessary conversations are when individuals find themselves, and find what they believe in. By silencing my ability to better understand the complicated aspects of our shared history and censoring my classmates' experiences centered around race and identity, completely removes crucial cultural awareness and critical thinking needed inside the classroom.

Creating an inclusive campus culture is also a vital part of fostering a diverse environment for all students on campus. Prioritizing diversity and practices of race-conscious admission remain necessary if we want to see more racially integrated classrooms. Affinity groups at Ohio universities such as programs and organizations for Black, Latinx, LGBTQ+, Asian and AAPI work to promote awareness of their culture while also providing a space for individuals to feel supported and valued. By threatening campus organizations that create a sense of community for students will only negatively affect a student's college outlook and experience, while turning away countless amounts of individuals from attending Ohio universities who value affinity groups when making their decision in higher education.

This bill is an act to silence and dictate the lives of students like me, who are adults by every definition, who pay thousands of dollars each semester to choose what we learn, what we are taught, and what groups and organizations we want to be a part of. As adults, we must be the ones to choose whether certain practices in the classroom are not working, whether we want to discuss politics and religion, or whether we want to foster spaces that promote diversity. Creating a wide-sweeping bill that attacks a student's education while simultaneously painting yourselves

in a 'savior of the students' image, undermines our work, our money, and our ability as adults to make decisions for ourselves.

It's simple, the realities of Senate Bill 83 would make it harder for marginalized students and staff to feel welcomed and heard. DEI training for staff can highly impact student outcomes at an institution, and without it, essential conversations may be silenced, and the creation of new knowledge will be lost. Diversity on campus improves intellectual engagement and fosters better scholars, thinkers, and citizens. Weaving how racial biases operate into curriculums can open the door to educating students about ways to prevent acting on their biases. Allowing students to choose what they want to study and in the context that works best for them, is the only way to improve higher education.

I urge this body to consider the implications of restricting instruction in diversity, equity, and inclusion and the impact on students learning environments without it. To promote this bill with such wide scale implications on students, faculty, and staff would attack all academic freedoms and destroy education in Ohio.

Please refocus your efforts and resources on addressing the longstanding systemic issues afflicting education and Ohio communities. I will continue to support measures that will increase diversity, equity, and inclusion for all individuals in higher education, and look forward to having more conversations regarding this issue.

Thank you.

Catherine Less