

Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

I am Carla Unzueta, a third-year student at The Ohio State University and the former Arts and Humanities Senator for Undergraduate Student Government. I am vehemently opposed to Ohio Senate Bill 83 as it will actively harm the students I was elected to represent rather than protect universities as safe spaces to share ideas and learn without censorship. That is why I sponsored a resolution, 55-R-40: An Emergency Resolution to Formally Condemn Ohio Senate Bill 83¹, which was unanimously supported by my elected peers and broke the record for the most cosponsors in Ohio State Undergraduate Student Government history. My resolution received overwhelming support because Senate Bill 83 would seriously damage the integrity of Ohio's higher education institutions like The Ohio State University.

As a representative of Arts and Humanities students, I was extremely concerned that this bill states: "Each state institution shall prohibit all policies designed explicitly to segregate faculty, staff, or students by group identities... including in orientations, majors..."². This section has the potential to eliminate all gender and ethnic studies departments in the state of Ohio. Gender and ethnic studies are important in today's society because they teach "strong research, writing, and oral skills, combined with a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in U.S. society" by analyzing often overlooked facets of the human experience, which in turn makes students "informed citizens and competitive job seekers"³.

The specific departments at OSU that Ohio Senate Bill 83 could potentially eradicate are: the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, the Center for Ethnic Studies, and the Department of African American and African Studies. This would ban the following majors and minors: Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies majors and minors; LGBTQ+ Studies minors, Women's, Gender and Public Policy minors; Latina/o Studies minors; American Indian Studies minors; Asian American Studies minors; and African American and African Studies majors and minors. If these programs are banned following the language of this bill, that could prevent the hundreds of students currently enrolled in these programs at Ohio State from

¹ Appendix A: 55-R-40

² Sec. 3345.87 (I), Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act, S.B. 83, 135th General Assembly, (2023). https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/sb83/IN/00/sb83_00_IN?format=pdf.

³ Ernesto Sagás, "Why We Need Ethnic Studies (Now More Than Ever)", Colorado State, Spring 2018, <https://magazine.libarts.colostate.edu/article/why-we-need-ethnic-studies-now-more-than-ever/>.

graduating with their planned degrees as well as the thousands of students who would no longer be able to attain these degrees at Ohio State and other Ohio universities in the future.

Additionally, these departments which could be eliminated as a result of this bill passing, currently instruct thousands of students in other majors and minors that take Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Center for Ethnic Studies, and African and African American Studies courses to fulfill General Education or elective course requirements.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 83 forbids universities and faculty from discussing any controversial beliefs or policies⁴. This section is a clear attack on academic freedom, which is defined as “the freedom to pursue truth in one’s teaching and research activities wherever it seems to lead without fear of punishment or termination of employment for having offended some political, religious or social orthodoxy”⁵. Academic freedom is essential to ensuring the quality of education for college students. Protecting instructors from changing their curricula based on outside pressure from authorities is a key component of higher education in democracies such as the U.S. Both historically and around the world today, authoritative governments have undermined academic freedom in order to crush dissent to their ideals. For example, Galileo was imprisoned for publishing texts stating the sun was the center of the universe, which although proven correct, went against what the religious leaders of the day declared could be taught to others. Moreover, as notable scholars such as Ta-Nehisi Coates stated in an open letter against bills restricting academic freedom: “If all terms can be censored from a college-level curriculum simply because they have been politically contested, then the College Board ought not include ‘liberalism,’ ‘populism,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘culture,’ or even ‘democracy’ in their curricula. When we acquiesce to eliminating words because opponents have tried to redefine or misconstrue their meaning, we allow power politics—rather than the pursuit of knowledge—to dictate the content of our courses.”⁶

⁴ Sec. 3345.0217, Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act, S.B. 83, 135th General Assembly, (2023). https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/sb83/IN/00/sb83_00_IN?format=pdf.

⁵ Owusu-Ansah, Collins. “Academic Freedom: Its Relevance and Challenges for Public Universities in Ghana Today,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 5 (2015): 173-179, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083581.pdf>.

⁶ Ta-Nehisi Coates et al., “US educational authorities must resist ‘anti-woke’ censorship,” *The Guardian*, March 8th 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230311071756/https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/08/anti-woke-censorship-colleges-open-letter?utm_term=Autofeed&CMP=tw_tgu&utm_medium&utm_source=Twitter.

Senate Bill 83 may also very well strip away the support systems for the minority students on campus I represented in my position as a senator. These support systems include extracurriculars, such as the Latinx Student Association or Society of Women Engineers, that provide minority students safe spaces where they can talk to other students with similar cultures, life experiences, etc who can understand and sympathize with them. This bill would have these extracurriculars eliminated⁷, however, the support they provide is well-proven to be essential to the success of minority students on college campuses⁸.

Senate Bill 83 also attacks the position of Chinese international students at OSU and other Ohio colleges in Section 3345.591⁹ as this section “specifically targets students at public post-secondary educable institutions within the state of Ohio who are of Chinese descent, nativity, or heritage unjustly and without merit, and thusly, fosters a non-inclusive, prejudicial, and discriminatory environment for the Chinese college student population in Ohio”¹⁰. Moreover, The Ohio State University is also a research institution and this provision threatens the ability of professors to conduct research and collaborate with scholars of other higher education institutions, a key aspect of developing academic practices. Additionally, as an Arts and Humanities Senator, I represented Ohio State students majoring or minoring in Chinese who would be prevented from studying abroad if this bill is passed. Total immersion in a foreign language has been proven again and again to be a greatly effective way of acquiring a second language which is why many people believe it to be the best way to learn another language¹¹. Therefore, if Senate Bill 83 were to pass, the students seeking to learn Chinese in Ohio universities to develop their professional skills further would be obstructed from doing so, and the quality of an Ohio higher education degree in Chinese would decrease drastically.

⁷ Sec. 3345.87, Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act, S.B. 83, 135th General Assembly, (2023).

https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/sb83/IN/00/sb83_00_IN?format=pdf.

⁸ Christina N. Baker. “Under-represented college students and extracurricular involvement: the effects of various student organizations on academic performance,” *Social Psychology of Education 11*, (2008): 273–298, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-007-9050-y>.

⁹ Sec. 3345.591, Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act, S.B. 83, 135th General Assembly, (2023).

https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/sb83/IN/00/sb83_00_IN?format=pdf.

¹⁰ Appendix A: 55-R-40

¹¹ Christina Isabelli-García, “Study Abroad Social Networks, Motivation and Attitudes: Implications for Second Language Acquisition,” in *Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts*, ed. Margaret A. DuFon and Eton E. Churchill (Cambridge University Press, July 23 2007), 231-258,

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=z0943xdHHcUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA231&dq=language+acquisition+study+abroad&ots=ozHeCWfY4&sig=AtbWQz0KKDhGPWsQxvWQG45Bc2k#v=onepage&q=immersion&f=false>.

Furthermore, this bill would prohibit all “employees of any state institution of higher education” from exercising their legal entitlement to strike¹². This section would affect the student workers I represented in my resolution who would be prevented from accessing their full rights as it infringes against their First Amendment protections of the right to protest as well as Section 7 of The National Labor Relations Act which states that all employees “have the right to self-organization... for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection”¹³.

For the reasons I have already outlined, if the provisions of the bill were to become a reality, the value of a degree in higher education from a public Ohio college or university such as Ohio State would be greatly diminished. Additionally, these provisions will marginalize students on campus. For both of these reasons, students and faculty alike will leave Ohio higher education institutions to learn or teach at universities in other states that do not have these restrictions. Therefore, universities like Ohio State will fall behind their peers in other states, which will, as a result, diminish the livelihoods of residents and businesses that depend on Ohio's universities, undermining our state’s economy.

In summary, Senate Bill 83 will eliminate several higher education degrees offered at The Ohio State University and other colleges across Ohio, it strips away the academic freedom of Ohio professors, it attacks the position of minority students enrolled in Ohio institutions of higher education, and it will devalue the quality of education that students are paying thousands of dollars to receive. Proponents of the bill claim to be helping students like me with this legislation, when in fact, the passage of Senate Bill 83 will actively harm Ohio students and devalue our education. If you *really* want to protect students pursuing a degree in higher education, you must vote against this bill and encourage all your colleagues to do the same. Doing anything less than this, and you would be knowingly causing damage to students in these institutions and devaluing the quality of any higher education degree in the state of Ohio.

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to speak out on such an important matter. If you have any questions regarding my testimony today, or 55-R-40: An Emergency Resolution to

¹² Sec. 4117.14(D)(1)(d), Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act, S.B. 83, 135th General Assembly, (2023).

https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/sb83/IN/00/sb83_00_IN?format=pdf.

¹³ U.S. Congress. United States Code: National Labor Relations, 29 U.S.C. §§ 151-166 Suppl. 2. 1934. Periodical. <https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1934-003029007/>.

Formally Condemn Ohio Senate Bill 83, please contact me at unzueta.7@osu.edu and I would be happy to discuss this urgent matter further.