

April 17, 2022

OH SB 83

Opponent Testimony

The Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Juliana Fierro, Law Student

Dear Chair Jerry C. Cirino, Vice Chair Michael A. Rulli, Ranking Member Catherine D. Ingram, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Juliana Fierro and I am a first-year law student at the University of Toledo **testifying in strong opposition of the *Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act (SB 83) and its companion bill in the house***. My testimony is strictly my own and does not represent any entity or organization in the State of Ohio.

I have lived in this state since I was born, and my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Akron was integral to my personal and academic growth. I want my alma mater, and my state, to continue to be a source of pride for me, but this bill threatens this.

Higher education should be a safe place where students can learn about any aspect of the world they desire. If we ban “controversial” discourse, we are preventing intellectual and personal growth, in addition to key analytical skills. I pursued a degree in History and Communication, and I know first-hand how important it is to teach all history, whether it is good or bad. To grow and learn from our past, we must understand the uncomfortable truths that have gotten us to this point. I cannot stress how important it is to understand all aspects of our history, even if the discourse is uncomfortable. Diversity has always existed,

I believe that without formal education, Ohio graduates will be at a disadvantage when applying for employment or graduate programs that necessitate this experience and knowledge. Had this bill been enacted during my undergraduate education, I feel that I would have graduated with gaping holes in my knowledge and may not have known enough about the legal field to commit myself to law school.

Ohio cannot advocate for intellectual diversity while also banning DEI programs. These trainings prepare students and employees to understand and respect each other in regard to core beliefs, thoughts, and actions. People come to Ohio universities from different cities, states, and countries, with varying exposure to different groups of people. DEI programming can foster a sense of community and acceptance regardless of differences, which is integral for building a cooperative work and learning environment. I believe these programs at Ohio State, as well as

events held by cultural groups, have broadened my horizons, and prepared me to succeed in my interactions with peers and patients as a law student, and future attorney.

While I understand the importance of professors being present to teach their students, I also believe professors who are paid appropriately and work in a supportive environment are capable of being better teachers. While striking takes professors away from their teaching time, we should acknowledge and improve upon their reasons for doing so. I fear that banning this bill would deter distinguished professors from teaching at our universities and detract from the quality of education offered to our students. As a college applicant 5 years ago, the accolades and experience of The University of Akron faculty was exciting to me, and I imagine this is a common sentiment for many prospective students today. These professors are experts on specific topics, thus they should be given the tools to teach their expertise. It is ignorant to believe that a non-expert can do a better job than one actually knowledgeable in their field and limit the discourse they can have.

This bill should be focused on improving higher education in Ohio, drawing more students and faculty into our wonderful state, yet I believe it will do the very opposite of this. Passage of this bill would be overall detrimental to Ohio students, which is why I urge the committee to **vote NO on SB 83**.

Sincerely,

Juliana Fierro