

Opponent Testimony for SB83

Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education

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I appreciate the time to testify today: Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and other committee members. My name is Sam Klein. I'm a resident of Shaker Heights and a student here in Columbus at The Ohio State University (Go Bucks).

It's unfortunate that we have to be here today, but I'm here nonetheless. I speak today in direct opposition to SB83. This is the People's House, you are elected to do the people's business. And frankly, this is anything but that. This bill is a stain on the higher education system in Ohio, a direct threat to the labor rights of many public sector employees across the state, and a slap in the face to students and faculty at institutions all over this great state.

You've packed so many negative things in this bill that it's hard to use all the time allotted to break it down bit by bit, but I'll do my best to deconstruct what I can and allow folks to understand the core issues with this dangerous piece of legislation.

I also want to preface this, this bill, and frankly, you members of the committee, have not been in a classroom for a very very long time. The youngest member here is Senator Reynolds, who according to her LinkedIn, was an undergrad last in 1998. Accordingly, you are all extremely far removed from what is actually taking place in a classroom of higher education and second-or-third-hand hearsay is not a good substitute.

You open this bill with statements that require our institutions to be committed to "intellectual diversity" and "free speech protections for students, staff, and faculty". Yet, as I read through this, and I've unfortunately read through the bill too many times at this point, it strikingly seems like you don't actually want intellectual diversity or free speech. The banning of DEI and mandatory diversity training as laid out in the bill indicates you have an issue with the presentation of a certain set of views to educators and staff. Wouldn't we want, by your own standards, the presentation of all sides of an issue to have our educators better equipped to teach students? You fundamentally cannot be for intellectual diversity and seek to ban the training of faculty on diverse matters. It's not compatible.

This is another interesting part of the bill, Sec. 3345.0217 subsection 4 (Page 9), you write "Affirm and guarantee that faculty and staff shall allow and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial matters and shall not seek to inculcate any social, political, or religious point of view". Just for context here, "controversial matters" has been defined in this legislation as "belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion

programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion". The way this bill is written, a student can't be presented more complex thoughts on these matters from their educators because you DEMAND they cannot "inculcate any point of view". Teachers are going to fear presenting accurate information because someone can and will report them for supposedly violating this bill in the name of swaying students from coming to their own conclusion.

While I've covered a bit about the educational side, it's arguably not even the most egregious part of this bill. Let's take a moment to look at Sec. 4117.14 (page 26 for those following along at home). This is an extremely egregious attempt to curb the labor rights of public sector workers across the state. Let me remind you of the last time a labor issue like this came before the Ohio electorate. In 2011, voters across the state, independents, democrats, and republicans alike came out in droves to vote down Issue 2 and nullify SB5. You. Lost. The will of the people was clear, this is a pro-union, pro-collective bargaining state.

You do not have a mandate for this legislation from the actual citizens of this state—extreme gerrymandering aside. No matter what you say, or what you try and write down into legislation, you will never be actually doing the work of the people in this legislative body. You use dog whistles to scare your voters and you use hatred to try and push forward your anti-worker and blatantly racist agenda. The day will come when the voters are going to be sick and tired of this. I encourage members of this committee and members of the Senate, if this passes through the committee, to vote down this egregious piece of legislation. It's a disservice to students, parents, and Ohio residents.