

April 17, 2022

OH SB 83

Opponent Testimony

The Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Rebekah Russell, MPH and Current Medical 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 Rebekah Russell, and I am a first-year medical student at Case Western Reserve University **testifying in strong opposition of the *Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act***. My testimony is strictly my own and does not represent any entity or organization in the State of Ohio.

As a graduate of Case Western Reserve University and Ohio resident, the caliber of education in this state is a source of pride for me. I agree that intellectual diversity, freedom of thought and expression in independent intellectual inquiry, transparency in education, and maintaining healthy faculty working conditions are key for the success of Ohio state educational institutions. However, I vehemently disagree with many of the ways these aims are achieved in this bill.

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. Additionally, these topics are integral to multiple degree programs (such as public health, sociology, climate change literature for environmental studies and foreign policy for international relations). 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 or graduate education, I feel that I would have been wholly underprepared for many aspects of my medical education.

Several studies have found that patients have better health outcomes when healthcare providers undergo DEI training and the inclusion of material on diversity, equity, and inclusion is a criteria for medical school accreditation. As a result, this bill has the potential to impact the health and well-being of Ohio residents. Moreover, this bill can directly threaten the accreditation of our state medical schools, especially The Ohio State University. In addition, the topics of climate change and abortion have come up often during my Master of Public Health program and

medical school education. Banning the discussion of these topics will make students graduating from Ohio public schools less competitive for graduate level academic programs compared to students applying from other institutions or states. This will negatively impact the job market and the desirability of Ohio public schools as a place for learning.

Ohio cannot advocate for intellectual diversity while also banning DEI programs. These trainings prepare students and employees to understand and respect each other in regards 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 have prepared me to succeed in my interactions with peers and patients as a student doctor.

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 this bill would deter distinguished professors from teaching at our universities and detract from the quality of education offered to our students. As an applicant 9 years ago, the accolades and experience of Case Western Reserve University's faculty was exciting to me, and I imagine this is a common sentiment for many prospective students today.

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,

Rebekah Russell

Further aspects of the bill, if you wish to discuss! :

- **Impose restrictions on discussion or training with regards to “controversial” topics**
 - Prohibit any mandatory programs or training courses regarding DEI;
 - Affirm that higher ed institutions will not endorse, comment on, or take action as an institution on current public policy controversies or controversial beliefs or policies;
 - A “controversial belief or policy” means any 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;

- Higher ed institutions cannot Use political and ideological litmus tests in any hiring, promotion, and admissions decisions, including diversity statements and other requirements that applicants describe commitment to a specified concept, specified ideology, or controversial belief;
 - A “specified concept” means a concept such as allyship, diversity, social justice, sustainability, systematic racism, gender identity, equity, or inclusion;
- Prohibits state institutions from funding, facilitating, or providing any support to any position, material benefit, policy, program, and activity that advantages or disadvantages faculty, staff, or students based on any group identity.
- Prohibits state institutions from training any administrator, teacher, staff member, or employee to adopt or believe in, or from hiring any employee to instruct others in, certain listed concepts regarding race or sex.
- Requires state institutions to issue and post on their websites an annual report regarding violations of the above prohibitions, resulting disciplinary sanctions, and statistics on the academic qualifications of accepted and matriculating students, disaggregated by race and sex.
- Requires each state institution to incorporate statements into its mission statement affirming commitment to free and open intellectual inquiry, independence of thought, tolerance of differing viewpoints, and equality of opportunity.
- Prohibits state institutions of higher education employees from striking and instead requires them to submit unresolved collective bargaining disputes to a final offer settlement procedure.
- Interactions with the People’s Republic of China
 - Prohibits state institutions from entering into academic relationships with academic institutions located in China or academic institutions located in another country and associated with the People’s Republic of China.
- Post a complete list of all speaker fees, honoraria, and other emoluments in excess of \$500 prominently on its website.
- **Student and peer evaluations**
 - Requires the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to develop a minimum set of standard questions to be used in student evaluations, including a question about whether a faculty member creates a classroom atmosphere free of bias.
 - Requires each state institution to establish a written system of faculty evaluations completed by students that uses the questions developed by DHE.
 - Requires state institutions to publish each faculty member’s average annual numerical score from student evaluations on the institution’s website by August 1, 2024, and annually thereafter.

- Requires state institutions to establish a written system of peer evaluations for faculty members with a focus on professional development regarding the faculty member's teaching responsibilities.
- **Five-year institutional cost summaries**
 - Requires state institutions to submit to the Chancellor a rolling five-year summary of institutional costs to be considered by the General Assembly when evaluating operating and capital project funding for each biennial main operating appropriations bill and capital appropriations bill.
 - Requires the Chancellor to submit a report to the General Assembly including all state institutions' five-year institutional cost summaries.
 - Requires that the president of each state institution or the Chancellor have the opportunity to present in the appropriate hearings conducted by committees considering higher education legislation regarding the institutions' five-year summaries.
 - Requires the Chancellor to, prior to the enactment of each main operating appropriations and capital appropriations bill, create and present a report to the
 - General Assembly including the total institutional costs for state universities and community colleges separately.
- **Syllabus requirements**
 - Requires each state institution to post a syllabus for each undergraduate course offered for college credit on its website.
 - Requires each state institution and the Chancellor to prepare reports regarding state institution compliance with syllabus posting requirements.