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Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam, I use she/they pronouns, and I am here on behalf of YWCA Columbus to oppose Senate Bill 83 on the grounds of the clauses that would prevent diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings at the higher education level. This bill is a direct threat to the vision of a liberated future that YWCA Columbus works towards.

YWCA Columbus has served the Central Ohio region for over one hundred years, and is a human services agency that is rooted in its values of social justice – our mission is to eliminate racism and empower women. In the last few years, we have seen the need for antiracist, anti-oppression education bloom. YWCA Columbus provides Justice, Equity, and Belonging trainings for community partners, ranging from private corporations to public entities, and we firmly believe that the outcomes of such trainings improves the experiences of all employees. DEI practices in businesses show better outcomes of profitability – organizations with gender diversity are 21% more likely to outperform their peers, and organizations with racial and ethnic diversity were 33% more likely to outperform their peers.¹ And while universities are not-for-profits, they are in the business of education and benefit similarly from DEI values. Furthermore, “organizations with inclusive cultures are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets as those without, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes.”² And, even further than just requiring employees to understand DEI values, centering restorative practices actually teaches employees how to prevent harm and/or repair harm when it occurs – a necessity, because a recent study from the American Psychological Association cited that 81% of workers reported that they will be looking for workplaces that support mental health in the future.³ Restorative skills equip leaders to retain their employees, seeing a lower turnover rate and saving their company time and money.

YWCA Columbus is concerned with the potential brain drain this legislation might induce – or rather, further. Ohio’s brain drain is a known phenomenon, with legislators even going so far as to incentivize students

¹ <https://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/appr-dei.pdf>

² [Perspectives on gender diversity and inclusion | Deloitte Insights](#)

³ [Workers appreciate and seek mental health support in the workplace \(apa.org\)](#)

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to stay in the state.⁴ Ohio is facing a struggle to attract and retain its best and brightest, and its homegrown best and brightest cannot wait to leave as soon as they are able. Not only is this backed by the data, but it is the anecdotal story of every single one of my peers. While those of us who stay to fight for this state see it as a challenge worth taking on, many see legislation like this and its intended chilling effect, and take it as a sign that Ohio will never get better for them – taking their skills, talents, and economic potential with them as they go. At a time when students are making impossible choices with their debt attached to them for life, diminishing the quality of DEI embedded throughout Ohio universities is not a strategic move, for business or for student life. While DEI resources are only one part of the decision-making criteria students look at when pursuing a degree, it is at the top of the list for many students, myself included, as we make the largest investment of our lives into our education.

DEI values are a net positive for everyone – they ask people to challenged preexisting notions about the world, encourage critical engagement with the world around us, and increase empathy in ourselves and one another. When making my decision about my education as an Indian-Ohioan, I look first to what universities are doing in this realm to ensure that they are critically minded and capable of encouraging engagements from those who do not look like themselves. It is an imperative, non-negotiable for my education, and for many others, that the university spearheads DEI values to ensure that those values touch every part of student life.

YWCA Columbus knows that Ohio is a state that is redeemable – with its flourishing research institutions, students from all over the world would benefit greatly from living and studying in our great state. We are excited when we get to train our partners and open their minds to learn more about the world. We know we make a difference through our work, and that universities similarly change lives for the better as we build a world that is not just survivable for people of color, women, and other marginalized people, but liberating. This legislation provides a roadblock to that vision, and we strongly encourage this committee not to pass it through.

Thank you, and I will take any questions you might have for me.

⁴ <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/12/06/brain-drain-ohio-bill-would-offer-incentives-keep-students-state/8887940002/>

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