

Testimony of Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, PhD  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
April 19, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, and I am a professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Central State University, where I have taught for 4 years. I do not represent Central State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

While there are aspects of the bill that I believe could be beneficial, there are many more aspects that are detrimental to faculty, staff, and students in higher education. First, banning employee strikes severely limits the ability of faculty, staff, and student workers to negotiate for better working conditions and pay. This ban also violates the National Labor Relations Act. Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act guarantees the right of employees to engage in “concerted activities” for collective bargaining. Strikes are included in the definition of concerted activities.

Second, banning programs, policies, and practices based on race, sex, sexuality, and gender identity as well as restricting discussions about controversial topics such as these stops students from exploring different viewpoints. The main point of higher education is to teach students how to critically examine their own perspectives and the perspectives of others so that they can come to their own thoughtful conclusions. Through discussions and writing, my students are able to express their own opinions and interact with others who have diverse opinions. This is a vital component of preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. In fact, the National Association of Colleges and Employers conducts a survey of employers to determine what employers want in recent college graduates. According to the most recent survey results, critical thinking and an awareness of equity and inclusion are two of eight career readiness competencies that employers are actively looking for when hiring (<https://www.nacweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2021/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2021.pdf>). Discussions and assignments comparing students’ perspectives to ideas and practices in other cultures and U.S. subcultures help them develop both of these competencies. Eliminating classroom discussions about controversial topics will leave students graduating from public colleges and universities in Ohio unprepared for the modern workplace. They will be less competitive and employable than students graduating from public colleges and universities in other states where these bans do not exist.

Third, on a more personal note, Central State University is the only public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Ohio. This bill will make it virtually impossible for me to teach my students as almost all of my students are Black or African American. They see and

experience racism in many forms, overt and subtle, every day and want to discuss those experiences in class. They see the structural racism and sexism in U.S. society in their everyday experiences when others judge them based on persistent stereotypes. To avoid discussing the existence of these societal structures is an enormous disservice to my students. Many of them have overcome incredible challenges in their journey to Central State. To ban discussions about these topics is the same as pretending systemic racism and sexism don't exist in the United States, which damages my students' already fragile trust in the government and the educational system. HBCUs were created in a time when Black and African American students often were prohibited from attending other colleges and universities. We cannot hide the reality of that history in our classrooms as it is a fundamental component of why HBCUs exist. My students are proud that they attend an HBCU because they feel that they have a place at Central State where they can be themselves. They are vocal about how they have to curb their behavior in broader U.S. society because of the stereotypes and assumptions many have about them. At Central State, they don't. This gives them a freedom of expression that allows them to grow, learn, and explore. SB83 will inhibit their growth and confirm what many of them already believe – most people in the U.S. don't care about them.