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Testimony on SB 83
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
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Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Maria Vitória, and I am a second-year Ph.D. candidate in the Studies of the Portuguese-Speaking World program at OSU. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83. There are many reasons why I believe this bill is dangerous to Higher Education and I'll mention a few.

To start, Senate Bill 83 prohibits state institutions from having any “mandatory programs or training courses regarding diversity, equity, or inclusion” (Sec. 3345.0217 (1), lines 207-208) at the same time that it says the institution must “ensure the fullest degree of intellectual diversity (Sec. 3345.0217 (3), lines 214-215). The first thing I wonder is how can we ensure intellectual diversity if we don't equip our community with tools to deal with, preserve and encourage diversity and inclusion. Then, I wonder what the harm is in requiring such courses and training. Ohio State University is a public institution, and diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of its mission and vision. OSU has more than 6.000 international students (according to its website). Students that come from different cultures, and backgrounds. I am Brazilian. Training and courses on diversity, equity, and inclusion help sensitize the community about differences. What is harmful about that? Learning to

respect others and their differences is a social skill that is never too late to be learned.

Dismantling our stereotypes and allowing ourselves to look through new perspectives is nothing but positive. Diversity is all around us and we need to know how to, at least, respect it.

Also, according to Senate Bill 83, and I quote, “The institution affirms that its duty is to treat all faculty, staff, and students as individuals, to hold them to equal standards, and to provide them equality of opportunity.” How do we hold people to equal standards without acknowledging their different backgrounds? How do we provide people with equality of opportunity when the scale is so unbalanced? Diversity, inclusion, and equity are not ideologies. Differences and injustices are realities, and there’s so much to be done to allow people to access places they never thought they could—including universities. Senate Bill 83 will not help increase access or ensure the success of a diverse student body.

I am a student but also a Graduate Teaching Associate. I’ll be responsible for teaching courses in the next few years that have syllabi designed primarily by a professor. SB83 says the syllabi must be, and I quote, “Accessible from the main page of the state institution's web site by use of not more than three links”. According to OSU’s website, there were an estimated 12,000 courses offered only in the academic year of 2022-2023. All of these would have to be stored for public access within three clicks, and the syllabi would need to be updated with every change made by the instructors and would have to include the biographical information of every instructor. Why? To me, the only explanation is

surveillance. It will allow instructors to be intimidated by people who are not connected to the university and are not really interested in, or know anything about, the content of their courses.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 83 includes climate change among the “controversial beliefs or policy” listed in the bill (183-87). According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Of the U.S. Department of Commerce](#) via their website [Climate.gov](#), the rate of warming since 1981 is more than twice as fast per decade, and the 10 warmest years in the historical record have all occurred since 2010.¹ How can a fact like this be classified as a “controversial belief”? With such language, SB 83 discredits science and discourages the pursuit of knowledge.

The authors of this bill seem not to be very aware of what happens in college classrooms today. We are very far from the time when students were expected to regurgitate what their professor said. In my experience at OSU as both student and instructor, the goal is for students to acquire the critical tools necessary to create and defend their own arguments. As instructors, we encourage them to read about “controversial beliefs,” to be open to the topics that surround them every day, and then we mediate their conversations and debates, and ensure that they know how to use evidence to support their conclusions.

One of the roles of higher education is to ensure critical thinking while preserving respect for others. OSU has lived up to this goal so far, but I am worried about

¹ <https://www.noaa.gov>

its ability to do so if SB 83 passes. As both student and instructor, I ask you to vote NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.