

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you greatly for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alyssa Latona. I am currently a fourth-year student at The University of Akron, pursuing my B.A. in Psychology. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Being that I am the first in my family to pursue higher education, I was given a culture shock once I stepped foot on campus. Until taking a DEI course, namely Psychology of Diversity, I had not had an in-depth discussion on topics involving race, religion, socioeconomics, jobs, politics, etc. Since taking Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion courses, I have gained appreciation for both sides of every controversial/complex issue. Additionally, the DEI courses that I have taken at the University of Akron have helped me to better understand and appreciate both political party ideologies, creating a stronger relationship with and admiration for the Republican party. Without taking these DEI courses, I (like many others) would have been trapped in a polarized world where misinformation is spread about various groups. The courses that teach Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are essential to keep individuals *from* being influenced, or brainwashed, by extremist groups who aim to polarize. When DEI classes are able to hold discussions that include open conversation from both sides of a controversial topic, more people gain exposure to those of opposing viewpoints and avoid bias by gaining all perspectives per topic. This is crucial for students because without an open space to discuss controversial or complex issues in, the ability for students to make their own conclusions *decreases*.

The ability for students to make their own decisions has been challenged with this bill. In fact, the very premise of being taught only factual material from complex/controversial issues, such as race, religion, politics, etc., persuades students in their thinking, as opposed to letting them come to their own conclusions. In a published study by Jordan A. Arellanes and Michael Hendricks called *Teaching Ethnic-Specific Coursework: Practical Suggestions for Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, the writers voice that open discussions in the classroom will decrease that instructor/student power structure. This structure is arguably the very role that creates the “brainwashing” or influence that SB 83 is proposing to eliminate, however, without DEI classes, *that* is the structure that will remain in classrooms.

I am currently partaking in a research study that utilizes student testimony to assess the level effectiveness (both positive and negative) of DEI courses in the university setting. Out of the 128 responses from students in a DEI class at the University of Akron, 118 students responded that the class created a positive impact in their lives. The 92% of students who provided positive feedback after taking a DEI class at The University of Akron overwhelmingly supported the open class discussions where controversial topics could be addressed. This environment for the students in the study, as well as myself, allows growth and connectedness among peers of all differing backgrounds. To take away the ability for students to talk openly about topics deemed controversial will suppress the opportunity for **so many students** to gain knowledge and experience necessary for cultural competence.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote **NO** on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.