

Testimony of Annika Kuretsky
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18, 2023

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Annika Kuretsky, and I'm originally from Illinois. I am currently in my third year of studying Social Justice Studies, Sustainability, and Latin American Studies at Miami University. I am here to testify not as a representative of Miami, but as a private citizen who is an out-of-state student at an Ohio public school. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83, and feel that it will only hurt the quality and reputation of public education in Ohio.

When I was a senior in high school, I applied to several universities across the country. Miami University was the only school in Ohio— the only school in the Midwest outside of one in Chicago and another in St. Louis— that I applied to. It was one of only two public schools that I applied to.

I ultimately was granted admission to nearly all of the institutions that I applied to, several of which are considered to be prestigious. The primary reason that I chose to attend Miami instead is the fact that they offer a Social Justice Studies major. If this program had not existed, I doubt that I would have made the decision to move to Ohio, where I now live and work.

If Senate Bill 83 had been passed while I was in the middle of deciding where to pursue my education, I am nearly certain that I would not have chosen to move to Ohio. Regardless of its intent, the bill reads to me as a restriction on the discussion of anything that could be construed as potentially controversial. I'm studying Social Justice Studies, Sustainability, and Latin American Studies. Controversy is my bread and butter.

I understand that many of the bill's proponents are concerned about discussion of controversial topics in a way that would alienate students with conservative viewpoints. I would imagine that these proponents would likely be very suspicious about what goes on in my courses. I would like to assure you that my courses are entirely fair to those whose beliefs might not align with the professor's. We study all aspects of an issue: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Everyone's opinion is welcome— in fact, class discussions aren't very interesting or worthwhile when everyone agrees. We are not graded based upon the ideological leanings of our theses, but based upon the evidence we provide to support them. This is because the purpose of the courses is not to indoctrinate students, but rather to give them facts and ideas with which they can then form their own opinions and foster their critical thinking skills.

In fact, upon telling my peers at Miami that I'm majoring in Social Justice Studies, I have been told on multiple occasions that the introductory social justice course was one of the most

thought-provoking and impactful courses that they have taken. This has come from students in programs across the university, ranging from the College of Arts & Science to the Farmer School of Business.

Based upon my reading of the bill, Senate Bill 83 would gut academic departments and severely restrict the ability of my courses— and of any liberal arts education— to encourage the development of critical thinking. If Ohio public schools are to produce thought leaders and a creative and productive workforce, as they have in the past, Senate Bill 83 must not be passed. If it were passed, simply put, the value of a degree from an Ohio public university would not be worth more than the paper that it is printed upon.

If passed, I would expect the rates of out-of-state students coming to Ohio public universities with their out-of-state tuition dollars to sharply decline. I would also expect in-state students to begin seeking an education elsewhere. While private school tuition and out-of-state tuition might be more expensive, droves of students will perform a mental cost-benefit analysis and decide that it isn't even worth paying less in-state if their degree would have such a reputation.

I'm very proud to attend Miami, and I'm very proud of the quality and integrity of my public school education. I want to see that the high quality education that Ohio schools have to offer is protected, and because of this, I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerously overreaching bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.