

## Jessica Starkey Speaking in opposition of Senate Bill 83

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee; thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on Senate Bill 83.

My name is Jessica Starkey. I am Director of Governmental Affairs on Undergraduate Student Government at Kent State University. I am here on behalf of undergraduate students at Kent State University. My purpose of this letter today is to advocate against Senate Bill 83. As an educational institution, Kent State values and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion. This would be prohibited with SB 83. DEI allows students to become more cognizant of their peers' culture, backgrounds, and self-expression. This, in turn, creates a more community-focused learning environment, and more well-rounded students. Kent State students, as well as students statewide, can participate in the free exchange of ideas and are intelligent enough to form their own opinions and conclusions without the intervention of the state government. Limiting discourse in any capacity that does not disrupt the learning environment is unconstitutional and violates the first amendment right to freedom of speech and expression. Kent State University is home to a place of diverse ideas. With this bill we would no longer be able to grow not only as students but as people. Learning who you are and what you stand for is the start to the lifelong responsibility of civic engagement. The removal of free speech in classrooms would not only hurt the students but also our community. This censorship would not only exclude the experiences of all marginalized communities from higher education, it would also ban the notions and ideas that are the basis for multiple departments at Kent State, including Peace and Conflict Studies, Africana Studies, Jewish Studies, and LGBTQ+ studies. The broad nature of this censorship would not only discourage students from being able to participate in the programs that interest them, but would also discourage teachers from teaching the concepts that they were hired to teach. I am a political science major, how do I learn and grow without being allowed to speak on my beliefs on policies? I learn to educate myself and defend my beliefs with debate and uncomfortable conversations, not silence. As a member of the LGBTQ community, I chose to go to Kent State because of the freedom of expression and freedom to speak about my experiences- the positives and the negatives. This bill is an attempt to silence all students with diverse identities at Kent State University and in any Ohio higher education institution. As an Undergraduate Student Government, we have created and passed a resolution to formally condemn Senate Bill 83. I fear that important discourse that causes students to learn and grow will no longer be accepted within this bill. Therefore I urge against the passing of Senate Bill 83. Chairman Cirino and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the time to share my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.