

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 Bene. I am a concerned citizen of Ohio and an educator. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

In particular, I will be speaking to the restrictions on controversial topics and on workers' rights that are presented in the bill. Senate Bill 83 has the power to prevent open and honest learning about diverse identities and lived experiences, and a wide range of diverse topics, in our institutions of higher education. According to the bill, these "controversial topics" are, as I said wide-ranging, including climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion. Potential repercussions of job loss and funding loss will have a chilling effect on faculty, staff, and students who want to learn about and engage in conversations about these diverse topics.

But why does that matter?

According to a report by the US Census Bureau entitled "Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections from 2020-2060", the demographics in the US are changing and becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and will continue to do so in the future. To cite some examples, people who identify as Two or More Races are expected to grow the most quickly over the next decades, by almost 200 percent by 2060, along with Asian population, by 100% by 2060, and Hispanic population, by 93%. People who identify as Black or African American are also expected to grow, by 40% by 2060. By 2045, the data predicts that people who identify as White/non-Hispanic will no longer be the majority population in the US.

Further, if we look at Ohio, statistics from the Census Bureau on the state of Ohio alone show that between 2010 and 2020, the population of people who identify as Black or African American increased by 71,100 people (5%), people who identify as Two or More Races increased by 443,607 people (186%), and people who identify as Asian increased by 106,276 (55%), while the population of people who identify as White decreased by 4.8%, just to give you an idea of how our population is becoming more diverse.

I cite this information because the fact is, students in our higher education institutions are going to be working with and for people from diverse backgrounds, both during their studies and out in the workforce. If we want Ohio to remain nationally and globally competitive economically, our graduates need to be able to appreciate diversity in its many forms, appreciate diversity of thought, the diverse lived experiences of others, and work successfully with people from all different backgrounds!

Learning from one another, not ignoring the experiences of those who may be different from ourselves, is how we move forward as a state and as a country.

With regards to workers' rights, the bill would ban strikes by employees of not only "any state institution of higher education", but also "members of a police or fire department; Employees of any public employee retirement system; Corrections officers; Employees of any state institution of higher education", as well as other groups. If we stifle employees' voices, in any of the categories that the bill would ban from striking, then we as a state risk making Ohio less attractive for employees seeking work. Specifically for higher education, while colleges and universities have a duty to their students, they are

also businesses, who are accountable to their employees. Further, if we want to give all students the opportunity to receive a higher education in Ohio, then we also need the staffing power to provide that to them, without setting up policies that will disincentivize jobseekers.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.