

Testimony Against Senate Bill 83 and its Companion Bill in the Ohio House  
By the Reverend Jack Sullivan, Jr., D.Min., D.D.  
Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches  
Delivered during a session of the  
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education  
Committee held on Wednesday, April 20, 2023

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

Thank you for permitting me to testify today. My name is the Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches, a 104-year-old statewide agency that brings together 18 Ohio Christian denominations as a Jesus Christ movement for unity, justice, and peace.

My reason for standing before you today is to signal my opposition to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Just a few weeks ago, On March 12, we Ohioans, ready to move beyond the limitations of darkness and eager to grasp every possible minute of daylight, joined people from across the nation in setting our clocks one hour ahead.

Sure, in moving into daylight savings time, we experienced the discomfort of losing an hour of sleep, but we gained longer and brighter days. Lawmakers in our very state, perhaps some of you, considered making daylight savings time a permanent fixture. It seems many of us, across zip codes and beyond parties, understand that we humans seem to flourish when there is more light available to us.

As I read page after descriptive page of SB 83, I formed the opinion that it is not a daylight-saving, human flourishing, light-producing measure but one that embraces the shorter and darker days of standard time, only this standard time is not simply about turning back our clocks for 60 minutes but instead for 60 years, to a time, a standard time, when African Americans and other People of Color in this state and across the country were frequently brutalized and trivialized, and not understood and respected as human beings made in God's image and likeness that they most certainly were and remain.

It was a time, a standard time when racial and ethnic diversity was viewed more as an unneeded impediment to the nation's progress than the necessary ingredient for progress that so many of us understand it to be today.

It was a time, a standard time when African Americans enrolled in predominantly White led institutions of higher learning were made to realize, as I discovered during my 1977 enrollment at Ohio University, that these schools were created by White people and catered to their views of the nation and world.

These schools boasted of faculty and administrators who were considered ready to give world-class leadership and service, even though many of them had never read a book by a person of color, nor attended a class taught by a person of color. There were few administrators who understood the experiences and aspirations of People of Color and few faculty who championed their histories and contributions to the betterment of society and the common good.

You see, what was understood as standard never included us. It was concerned more about White experiences, orientations, and aspirations than ours.

During my Ohio University, African American students constituted a small percentage of the total, predominantly White student body. There was no high-level leadership, no Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional whose mandate was to marshal University goods and services aimed at supporting and ensuring the success of African American students.

Had it not been for the daylight savings time light of a handful of faculty like Dr. Francine C. Childs, one of the early tenured African American faculty in the Afro-American Studies Department, and Dr. David Descutner, a White professor in what is now the Scripps College of Communication, had it not been for these professors, who were proactive in their caring and dedicated to the success of African American students, untold numbers of us might never have graduated from that great university on the Hocking River.

Drs. Childs and Descutner were the DEI professionals of my era at Ohio University.

Imagine how later generations of African Americans and other People of Color felt when they arrived at these impressive Predominantly White Institutions and discovered that there were DEI professionals on board, not to indoctrinate anybody but to encourage everybody to view racial and ethnic diversity as the gift of God and the societal strength that it is.

As a man of faith, I believe Ohio's best days are not behind us but ahead of us. Now is not the time for us to turn back the clocks under the guise of creating a standard time, colorblind society. Anyone who advances an idea of colorblindness, no matter how well-meaning they may be, would do well to consult a licensed ophthalmologist, for with respect to race and ethnicity, it is not possible to be colorblind; nor is it desirable.

African Americans and People of Color cannot and will not blend into the oft-ignored wallpaper of society. We have stories worth telling, experiences worth sharing, and aspirations worth broadcasting. As with moving into daylight savings time, these accounts can make readers and listeners feel a bit uncomfortable. Even so, these are American stories, American experiences, and American aspirations, and they are as American as those pertaining to anyone else.

Dear Committee members, Ohio needs more light! Now is the time for us to stay focused on the daylight savings time of diversity, equity, and inclusion programming and leadership.

For the good of students and every level, for the good of faculty in every institution, for the good of every agency, and for the good of our diverse and beautiful state in all of its towns, counties, and cities, please reject the exclusive, darkness of standard time as advanced by SB 83.

Say no to SB 83 and then send it to the only place it rightfully belongs: Ohio History Connection where it may rest with other measures designed to turn back the clock of human progress instead of moving us forward as guided by the inclusive hope of increased light. Thank you.