

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 Kaleb Washington. I am a third-year mechanical engineering major and Morrill scholarship recipient at the Ohio State University. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Below is an excerpt from a piece I wrote earlier this year:

“01/02/22 - Trauma

BEEP BEEP BEEP!

“GET OUT THE WAY!” Sam blurts from behind the wheel at the resting car in front of us, its left indicator flashing a warning yellow light back at us.

“BRO MOVE!” Rob hollers from the passenger seat again at the motionless car, a caged tiger watching its prey.

Suddenly, the car’s red brake lights glare back at us and the car rocks into its parked position. The door swings open and a man emerges from the car, a black mask covering his face. He reaches into his jacket pocket unveiling a hint of silver metal from the crevice. “ITS A GUN! GO GO GO!” ***BEEP BEEP BEEP!***

I jolt up from my bed and prop my hands up behind my back, breathing and sweating as if I had just finished running a mile. I glance around my dark room seeing the effigies of the familiar blank walls and bedsheets of my room. *I’m not there anymore*. I reminded myself, I would no longer let the events of the previous months define me.

1/19/2022 - Depression

KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK!

“I’m asleep”, I groaned at the door, pressing my ear down into my deep blue pillows.

KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK!

“I said I’m asleep bro!” I echoed as my eyelids fell back down to their partner, a prayer for just

another hour of rest.

KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK!

This better be good. I thought to myself as I stormed up to the dormitory door. I yank the door open and glare outside at my friend Mike’s blood red cheeks.

“Kevin.....” Mike muttered as his eyes shifted towards the floor. “Kevin’s dead.....he killed himself.” I stood there silent as a mouse while Mike trudged next door to my best friends’ room. I waited a few seconds then followed. I shifted the door open and was greeted by the teared and frowned faces of my best friends crying a solemn ode to the angel we lost.

Both of these events occurred at the start of my winter semester, forcing me to deal with both a near death experience, its trauma, and the suicide of one of my best friends while focusing on my academics simultaneously. In addition, three other people passed away in my family and friends — my grandfather, my uncle and one of my other friends that attended OSU in the fall of

2021. These life events distracted my focus from school as I was bouncing around the country from funeral to funeral.

After Kevin's suicide, the first place I went was my advisor for NSBE's room, who connected me with the a campus counselor. The counselor guided me towards finding healthy coping mechanisms and suggested finding a support group. Because my advisor from NSBE led me to the counselor, I knew there was no better support group than NSBE. After communicating my struggles with those I was closer to in organization A they consistently checked in on me, sharing their own experiences and in some cases even buying me meals. Knowing I had organization A behind my back made classes all the more bearable, I wasn't my best self, but I had a group of friends devoting their time towards making sure I became even better than my best self. There was nothing more I could ask for."

The two advisors, the people that helped me get the most support during my time on campus when I was in a legitimately life-threatening situation were all staff in the Diversity Office within the college of engineering. Life threatening events will continue to occur at the Ohio State University, and students need a space and need people who they can feel comfortable talking to in order to receive support, without this support my life and its path would be in jeopardy, and that is no understatement.

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

