

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 Nina Brown. I have grown up in Ohio and am now a first year at the Ohio State University as a public health major. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Despite growing up near Columbus, I felt as though I entered a new world coming into college. I quickly embraced the flourishing “intellectual diversity” that is apparently under threat, joining various clubs and faculty discussions. We are given the opportunity to explore topics and ways of thinking that high school cannot offer. In public health classes, we study health-related issues through various historic, cultural, economic, and political viewpoints. Yes, some of these are controversial, but they give nuances to our conversations. For many folks from small towns, discussions of equity and diversity are crucial to be prepared for working in large companies. We should leave with a strong skill set for our field but also the tools to stand up for more innovative and safe workplaces.

Further, the university has a responsibility to create a safe space for its students and faculty. Students that thrive in DEI programs may come from backgrounds in which college does not tailor to their needs. These programs are meant to foster a sense of belonging and build community with others. Here at OSU, there are student groups for everything, and it would be unfair to prohibit students from uniting over a common identity. Contrarily, many “free speech events” that this bill would lead to are riddled with hate speech and will make campus more dangerous.

Further, I find it shallow to require a US history and government class while simultaneously prohibiting higher education employees from striking, something foundational to our history. I expect at the very least for these classes to not be the white-washed history many of us were fed in high school.

As I continue my education at OSU, I hope to gain a robust education that acknowledges and is accommodating to everyone’s differences. 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.