

Testimony of Clara Conover
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
19 April 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Clara Conover. I am a Cincinnati native and a third-year student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio double majoring in Political Science and Geography & Sustainable Development. I am simultaneously working on my master's in Geography.

Today I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 83 as a private citizen in solidarity with my fellow Ohioan students, educators, and changemakers. This bill, as myself and many others have understood it, endorses the censorship of selective 'controversial' topics, and is harmful to students as holistic learners as well as the future of the Ohioan workforce and economy. It is imperative that the Senate vote 'no'.

When my future employers read of my Ohioan public university education on my resume, I will not be in the board room to defend an honor that this bill will tarnish. A liberal arts degree, especially in the humanities, will no longer carry its honorable weight if students cannot discuss injustice in an open and critical environment. Ignorance is theft of the greatest degree. For example, Senators, when my generation is choking on the smog of yours, I deserve to know why I cannot breathe.

As noted on many of your campaign websites, Senators, education is preparing us students to fill a role within Ohio's economy and workforce. Every single Fortune 100 company has put out a statement expressing commitment to DEI initiatives.¹ The values of the free market have taught us that diversity, equity, and inclusion matter in the career world. I imagine it will be harder, Senators, to run reelection campaigns on the good faith of 'bringing jobs to Ohio' or on 'growing the Ohio economy' if all skilled positions have fled the state and all bright and promising students have left for better views. You know you are risking an exodus that would jeopardize the future of our state and render us left in the dust as the rest of the world moves forward.

It is both a failure and an embarrassment to Ohio to allow graduates to hold diplomas while denying reality, which cuts to the core of this bill. A *scientist* should not be granted a diploma while denouncing the *science* of climate change. A doctor should not hold a diploma while publicly stating inaccurate, unfounded racist beliefs about hygiene. If you cannot respect others, the real world teaches us about public consequence—something education must prepare students for.

There is a final thought I'd like to leave you with:

¹ HR Dive. "Once Neglected, DEI Initiatives Now Present at All Fortune 100 Companies." Accessed April 18, 2023. <https://www.hrdiver.com/news/2022-fortune-companies-dei/627651/>.

Saint Julie Billiart, the patron saint of my high school, provided an ethos valuable to any educator: 'Teach them what they need to know for life'. Ignoring injustice does not make it any less real, but education can, in part, heal prejudice.

If this bill passes, there will be more open parking spots on Ohio's campuses. There will be empty dorm beds and quiet quads. I will watch my classmates move away from Ohio. I will watch my educators leave, I will watch my degrees mean less and less. If Ohio is not educating for our real lives in the real world and cutting through 'controversy' to reach the truth, it is failing every single student, all 480,000 of us.

We must have a certain amount of courage as Ohioans, Americans, and students to look critically at our pasts to create better futures, and this means speaking about injustice when we see it. This means voting 'no' on this bill, if not to protect my education, then to save both the Ohio economy and your own reelection campaigns.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, Senators.