

Good afternoon, Senator Cirino and members of the Senate workforce and higher education committee. My name is Jenin Abdelaziz. I live in Akron, Ohio. I am representing the University of Akron today as a student in opposition of SB 83.

The establishment of SB 83 is harmful to institutions such as universities and colleges in the state of Ohio. Senate Bill 83 hurts Ohio because it systematically fosters a lack of understanding, lack of respect for marginalized and minority groups, and undermines contributions of all people in Ohio. DEI is not indoctrination and ideology centered. DEI is about recognizing and valuing the differences among individuals and promoting fairness, respect, and inclusiveness for all. It is important to acknowledge that individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities bring unique perspectives and talents that contribute to the success of all institutions such as universities and colleges. SB 83 may limit the ability of these institutions to create inclusive environments and hinder their ability to attract and retain a diverse student body, faculty, and staff. It is also important to note that DEI is not a political issue, but rather a moral imperative. As a first generation- american and muslim american I have often been on the side of discriminatory and hateful racism. As a human, I am cognizant of the ignorance and lack of information some people hold toward me and others alike and force myself to forgive, but as an American, I want better for everyone in our country, and that means being educated and respectful about the different kinds of people in our country. Which comes from the top down. Recognizing the struggles that minority groups have endured cannot be reduced to an ideology, when it is rather an acknowledgement of the stark realities that exist. We cannot ignore the pasts, identities, histories, and struggles of the people of Ohio, as these form an intrinsic part of the tapestry of our nation's diverse cultures, religions, languages, ethnicities, and traditions. It is this very amalgam that has made America the beacon of hope that it is today.

However, SB 83 serves as a striking example of how systematic oppressions continue to pervade our society, seeking to portray diversity, equity, and history as sources of shame rather than as the cornerstones of our nation's heritage. The United States graciously embraced my family when they arrived as refugees, a testament to the nation's spirit of inclusivity, integrity, and unwavering commitment to providing opportunities to those in need. My parents consciously chose America as our new home, recognizing the values and virtues that make this nation exceptional. Now, my sisters are law school graduates and practicing using their education to promote justice through the lens of law. My brother is an engineer, my younger brother an aspiring engineer, and I am a soon to be college graduate working in supply chain. All of these opportunities are given to us through DEI programs and support from alike communities and institutions.

Empowering diverse voices, and allowing them to be heard, is key to realizing the full potential of our society. The future lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, and workers of Ohio deserve to have their identities, histories, and perspectives valued and celebrated. We must amplify them. Support them. Not tear them down, and deny them their voice and ourselves the TRUTH. Support them, the future lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, and workers. When you support marginalized groups, they support you by upholding the law, taking care of the sick, serving our nation, and teaching our youth.

Who are we, as a nation, if we wish to silence those who have helped build this? Who are we to the world if we wish to silence and dismiss those of diverse backgrounds in our own country? Who are we if we deny not just minorities and marginalized groups their voice and identity, but majority groups the opportunity and honor to hear them?

