

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Hello, and thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Katie Johnson. I am a first year at Ohio State University, and I am vice president of one of the many LGBTQ organizations that students run on campus. I am writing today to express my concern on Senate Bill 83 and the implications that such a bill brings when it comes to post secondary education. I worry that this bill will lead to tighter government control over the subjects that are available at public and private universities in the state of Ohio and that it will, instead of protecting the students' freedom of belief, will stifle it. I worry that students will not be able to properly learn the critical thinking skills that college so often teaches us, and I worry that this bill will only serve to create a greater rift between political ideals which will only lead to more conflict.

One of the things that I will forever be grateful for when it comes to my education is my freedom to discuss topics. Even while in high school, I have never had to worry about another person's ideas being forced on me, and my teachers have never forced me to sway to one opinion or another. In college, I have felt even more free to learn, to educate myself, and to discuss my beliefs. The classes I have taken that fall under the DEI category opened my eyes to another part of life that I wasn't aware of. I have been able to make myself a better family member, friend, and citizen thanks to these classes.

Outside of my own story, I know that these classes help teach people about topics like the LGBTQ+ community. Stereotypes are at the forefront of stifling learning, and being able to take classes that make a student use their critical thinking on stigmatized topics is one of the most amazing parts of college. Getting rid of the mandatory DEI classes and stifling conversation and discussion on controversial topics will only lead to more hurt, fighting, and separation. This would allow students who turn away from any stigmatized group to never learn about their own struggles in the past. This allows communities like mine, like the LGBTQ+ clubs and families that have welcomed me with nothing but warm arms when I was struggling, to continue to suffer from misinformation and stigmatization.

I worry about the hate that will be able to continue to spread if Senate Bill 83 passes. I worry that, if this bill were to pass, there will only be more division in beliefs,

and that we will lose our ability to talk to each other. Please, I implore you to think about the good that learning about communities outside your own does for students. Have faith that the colleges in the state of Ohio, which teach the future generations of the United States' workers and thinkers, will continue to do what they have done for as long as I can remember; teach, create critical thinkers, and build stronger futures that break down barriers. Thank you.