

Testimony of Erynn Beaton, Ph.D., M.B.A.
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18, 2023

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

My name is Erynn Beaton. I am an assistant professor in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University where I lead our nonprofit curriculum. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I am proud to be among the public affairs faculty at OSU where we are educating the next generation of public and nonprofit servants. Following longstanding scholarship and research, we teach our students the four pillars of public service: 1) Economy, 2) Effectiveness, 3) Efficiency, and 4) Social Equity. [Social equity](#) has been recognized as fundamental to public service and its education since the 1960s. When we use the term equity, we mean it by its dictionary definition: “[the quality of being fair and impartial](#).” Imagine my bewilderment to find that S.B. 83 (line 186) labels “equity” as a “controversial belief or policy.” If S.B. 83 were passed, courses I teach and the Glenn College itself would cease to exist.

A course I teach titled “Nonprofit Organizing for Diversity and Justice” is an introductory course required of nonprofit management students so they can learn about issues like tax exemption, nonprofit economics, philanthropy, volunteerism, and accountability. It is organized as a debate course where I pride myself in teaching students to think independently and critically about salient issues. At the outset of the course, I tell my students that there is never a right or wrong answer to any of the questions I pose for debate. In fact, if there is an answer to a debate question, it’s likely to be: “it’s complicated.” If students can comprehend and accept the complex nature of the world around them, I know they have learned. For example, one of the debate questions listed in the syllabus is: What salary for a nonprofit executive is too much? We discuss both sides of the debate. On one hand, is it fair (read: equitable) to taxpayers and nonprofit beneficiaries if a nonprofit leader draws a half-million-dollar salary from a cash-strapped nonprofit? How many more people could be served? On the other hand, is it fair (again read: equitable) to nonprofit leaders if they are not paid market rate for their leadership skills? How will the nonprofit sector recruit talented leaders? I receive excellent teaching evaluations in the course, ranging in the last two years from 4.75-4.94 out of 5. I would be alarmed and ashamed if a student said they didn’t feel comfortable speaking up in my class, something I’ve never heard in my teaching evaluations.

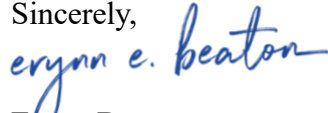
S.B. 83 would eliminate this course because the bill prohibits requiring “diversity, equity, and inclusion courses” (lines 28-29). This course is required to earn a nonprofit management minor or specialization, so I understand it to be included. I could strip the course down of any content that discusses fairness. I could lecture to the students for 80 minutes, 2 times a week about theories of the nonprofit sector, but I assure you students would resent you for it and the course would go from a 4+ rating to a 1. Students want to be challenged to think for themselves, to discuss issues that matter to them and to the world. Don’t deny them that opportunity.

If S.B. 83 were to become law, not only would important courses be discontinued, but the entire John Glenn College would likely cease to exist along with its training for [veterans](#), [law enforcement](#), [election officials](#), [fundraisers](#), and [elected state officials](#). Given the centrality of social equity in public service, it should not surprise you that accreditation standards mandate that the Glenn College values, teaches, and upholds equity. We are accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), which [requires](#) that “the mission, governance, and curriculum [of our] program shall demonstrably emphasize” the public service values of “respect, *equity*, and fairness” (emphasis added). Provisions include:

- “Faculty Diversity: The program will promote equity, diversity, and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, retention, and support of faculty members” (see contradictory language in S.B. 83 lines 207-208, 255-259, 265-268).
- “Student Learning: As a basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies determined by its mission and public service values” (recall equity is one of the public service values and see lines 28-29, 207-208 for contradictions in S.B. 83).

Thus, this bill would legislate away the Glenn College’s ability to seek accreditation and would tarnish its legitimacy within the field. More importantly, because social equity is central to good public and nonprofit management, students graduating from our program would lack key competencies, putting them at a disadvantage in the national job market.

Senators, we all want intellectual diversity and independent thought, but S.B. 83 would make matters far worse, not better. The way to guarantee free speech for some is not by taking away the free speech of others.

Sincerely,

Erynn Beaton