

Senate Bill 83 Testimony

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Sam Buehrig, a Web Developer and Artist from Dayton, Ohio. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and to share my reasons as to why Senate Bill 83, and its companion bill in the House, should not pass.

I'd like the room to reflect for a moment, what is politics? What does it mean? When it was first coined 5 centuries ago, it meant "Affairs of the cities". Though I'm sure we can agree that "Affairs of the People" is a more apt description in our time. And today, politics is more prolific than ever. So many issues, some critical, some less, are points of heated debate among the people of our nation. I'm sure many in the room, and likely even some officials seated, have been surprised at the lengths at which people have gone to contrive sensationalized topics. In summary, politics is America's bread and butter, for better or for worse.

Though, that is *exactly* why the language of Bill 83, specifically restricting "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy" is uniquely problematic. The most benevolent movements of our nation have been politically contentious. The Civil Rights movement, Womens' Suffrage, even the American Revolution were the most politically-contentious movements of their times.

Two centuries ago, Loyalists and Patriots duked it out through pen and protest in our colleges and universities. Alexander Hamilton was still in college as he engaged in pamphlet wars to argue for American Independence. Can you imagine our country in a world where our students and professors were prevented from challenging the status quo? Not to challenge the state of British rule in order not to upset the sensibilities of students and their conceptions? It's the very reason dissenting opinion is codified into our constitution.

And who decides which ideas are "too controversial" to be publicly endorsed? Do we really want to place the power to determine what is permissible to be taught in the hands of the state? I don't doubt that those seated in Ohio government are certain that they are responsible enough to wield this power. But you are creating a tool that will outlive your position.

Things like religion, and even our own military have been contentious since the genesis of our country, and the language of this bill would allow for the removal of state funding from religious institutions, or colleges which offer military-adjacent ROTC programs. Passing this bill would be short-sighted, and even negligent. Do you trust every official coming after you to righteously wield this power in your wake?

Our Colleges are the stations of the greatest minds of our nation. Martin Luther King Jr.'s understanding of the humanity and potential in all of us grew through his studies at Morehouse College. The impact of such individuals on the betterment of our country is monumental. But where would they have led us, if they led us at all, if they were not permitted to discuss and debate the most controversial topics of their day? Anything worth debating is divisive.

I see a lot of fear in Bill 83. Fear of a changing world, fear of an uncertain future. We have the benefit of hindsight knowing which ideological movements of the past were good and which were bad, but we as a nation didn't have that wisdom then, and we can't pretend we have that wisdom now. If we can't allow our policy and beliefs to stand up to criticism, how can we know if they remain right through the shifting tides? It is the strength and responsibility of our nation to be able to revise and adapt to the ever-changing paradigm of our tremulous world.

And so, I ask you to stay true to the values of our nation, and vote NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. And I'm happy to take any questions you might have.

~Sam Buehrig