

Testimony of Rebeka Campos-Astorkiza, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 19, 2023

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

My name is Rebeka Campos-Astorkiza, and I am a professor of Hispanic Linguistics at The Ohio State University, where I have taught since 2007. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

While there are many aspects of SB83 that I find worrisome, unfounded, and unnecessary, I will focus on the elements that pertain to restrictions and bans on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training and teaching. Chair Cirino in his sponsor testimony suggests how detrimental DEI can be for our students. However, this assessment is not warranted if one examines the DEI work being done at Ohio universities and colleges, and the positive impact that it has on our students, including preparing them to join a global workforce. Let me elaborate on this and give some examples from my experience as an educator at OSU. We know that students' sense of belonging in the university is a strong predictor of their success in college.¹ We, as educators, play an important role in helping students develop this connection and feel part of the university, but to do our best, we need to know and understand our students' backgrounds and unique experiences. DEI discussions and training equip us with the tools we need to achieve this. For example, in my classes I strive to create an inclusive space where all students can participate and be listened to with respect and curiosity. To accomplish this, I use strategies that I have learned through DEI training. I encourage discussions where students examine different ideas and examples and use the critical thinking and analytical skills learned in class to develop their responses and reactions. In my class, students are invited to use their experiences and knowledge as a point of departure and from there, and based on the course material, expand their horizons and understanding of the topics we discuss. In this way, students can see the value of what they bring to the classroom and also learn that their lived experiences are not the only way to look at certain problems – other experiences, oftentimes coming from people with different perspectives and backgrounds, can enrich our analyses. I regularly witness this realization in students when they express their wonder at learning about other cultures to their own and being able to see a given situation from a new angle. This is what DEI work is about; it allows us to better prepare students, who become more adaptable and able to see issues from a big-picture perspective. In fact, this is what employers are looking for, as trends in companies and corporations show,² and banning DEI work from our campuses would have detrimental consequences for our students, placing them at a disadvantage, as they join the workforce.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful and costly bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ See, for example, Terrell Stryhorn (2019) *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. Routledge.

² HR Drive "[Once neglected, DEI initiatives now present at all Fortune 100 companies](#)", July 20, 2022.