

Testimony of Heather Caprette, M.F.A., Cleveland State University

Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair

April 18, 2023

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

I am an employee at Cleveland State University writing to testify against the passage of Senate Bill 83. The passage of this bill will hurt Ohio's economy, driving potential employees and students away from the state.

The passage of this bill would take away a union's ability to strike. The ability to strike is important to having management at educational institutions negotiate in good faith with their employees. Without it, key employment benefits that promote quality of life in Ohio are at risk of being taken away. If salaries, hourly wages, and benefits go downward for union employees in Ohio, they will go down for Ohioans working in the private sector also. People with technical skills and degrees from higher education will not be attracted to Ohio as a place to live. We know from a 2020 decision at CSU to deny raises for two unions for three consecutive years, that talented, long-standing employees leave our educational institutions and leave Ohio. Our economy will suffer from loss of talent.

SB 83 includes many elements against freedom of speech and intellectual freedom. The bill includes restrictions on materials taught at universities and the prohibition of required training in diversity, equity, and inclusion. A law that takes away funding from an institution that requires DEI training is especially damaging. Punishment of institutions and employees that promote or teach diversity, equity and inclusion of faculty, staff and students who are different from the majority will deter people from wanting to work for or attend Ohio's educational institutions. They will attend college elsewhere.

Accrediting bodies look at retention rates of underrepresented groups and first-generation students. Senate Bill 83's prohibition on training in diversity, equity and inclusion will drive underrepresented groups away from attending college in Ohio. There is the potential for loss of accreditation of programs in institutions of higher ed in Ohio if SB 83 is passed. This would make Ohio less competitive in the higher education market.

Many donors and grant funding bodies require institutions to support diversity, equity, and inclusion. Loss of money from these donors will hurt Ohio's progress in research and development when they select institutions in other states to receive their funds. This could also drive potential faculty and students away from Ohio.

SB 83 would require all future college graduates to take three credit hours of American government and history that could be potentially edited to fit a narrow perspective, leaving out facts about our country's history. A bachelor's degree could be withheld for not completing the course. This requirement limits students' freedom of choice in pursuing courses that fit their interests and educational goals. It also limits what can be taught within the course.

The forced inclusion of the question, "Does the faculty member create a classroom atmosphere free of political, racial, gender and religious bias" on student evaluations of teaching could hinder the teaching of facts about this country's history when the teaching of these facts could be misinterpreted as bias. Part of teaching and learning also involves looking at diverse perspectives on issues of politics, race, gender, and religion. The inclusion of this question discourages an open forum of communication within a class and critical analysis of important issues in our lives. Passage of SB 83 would hinder intellectual growth.

Senators, I encourage you to do the right thing for Ohioans and stop the passage of SB 83.

Sincerely,

Heather Caprette, M.F.A

Cleveland State University