

Pedro Schacht Pereira, PhD
Opposition Testimony on SB 83
Ohio 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, thank you for considering this testimony in opposition to SB 83. My name is Pedro Pereira and I am an Associate Professor of Portuguese in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the Ohio State University, where I've taught since 2008. I am speaking to you today as a private citizen, not as a representative of my university.

I grew up in Portugal, a country that was under a fascist dictatorship from the 1930s to the mid 1970s. In my fourth year in college, during a Contemporary Philosophy class (where the readings ended in the 1940s and the professor read from notes presumably written as long ago, judging from the yellowed sheets of paper he held in his hands), one day one of my colleagues — incidentally, one of the brightest in the class — raised his hand to ask a simple question (“what if...?”). His question was followed by a dramatic silence, after which the professor asked him: “Mister, do you want to come here and teach the class in my place?” In the early 1990s, this was surely not the norm, but rather a remnant from Portugal's authoritarian past, when higher education, along other sectors of society, were under political dictates and micromanaged by government authorities.

It was precisely to ensure that I wouldn't face similar curtailments to my freedom of thought that I decided to pursue my graduate training at a US institution. I have now lived longer in this country than I ever lived in Portugal, and I have worked in private as well as public universities in four different states. In all of them I have been fortunate to study, research, and teach unencumbered by the political views of anyone—faculty, students, administrators, or legislators. That is because under the tenets of academic freedom, and in a democracy, the curriculum is determined by the specialists in the various fields of knowledge covered, not by government officials or administrators appointed by them.

The proponents of SB83 claim that this bill will guarantee freedom of expression to students, but I am convinced it will do exactly the opposite. Freedom cannot thrive under political interference, mandates, or bans. My home country is still paying a steep price for decades of self-sabotage brought by political and ideological stifling; do not allow Ohio to go down this path. For the sake of our students, and for the sake of the economy of our state, please oppose SB 83. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.