

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education
April 19, 2023

Cecilia Yeckley, Student
The Ohio State University

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Cecilia Yeckley and I am an Evolution & Ecology student at Ohio State. I am writing this testimony to express concern about parts of Senate Bill 83. For the most part, I am opposed to this bill. I support the inclusion of the student experience in evaluating faculty, I believe our board of trustees deserves proper training for their roles, and I believe further inquiry into more efficient education such as 3 year bachelors degree programs would benefit many Ohioans. What concerns me about the bill is the general overreach into the content of student educations proposed by legislators of the Ohio Statehouse, particularly with regard to the restriction of so called controversial topics.

This past summer I was lucky enough to do biogeochemical research in the wetlands along the coast of Lake Erie, the region I call home. While I cannot call myself an expert in this area, I learned from faculty, graduate students, and post docs at the University of Toledo, who are experts. We aimed to improve models of the space between land and water, an area that is hugely important to the economic and ecosystem services in Ohio. These models are important in the face of climate change, an undeniable force facing 100% of the space and people of this state. Under this bill, education on climate change would be restricted due to the ongoing conversation regarding what should be done about this phenomena. I am writing to ask that a distinction be made between this debate and the existence of climate change as a scientific phenomena. To deny its existence and not allow students to acknowledge this reality would stunt future students out of Ohio from becoming leaders in the natural sciences for years to come. I would liken it to an economist that never learned about supply and demand. While I am no expert in the interactions found in the natural world, I know that the scientific method is worth believing, and that it has shown time and time again that the only credible controversy is the human responsibility to act, and I don't believe that this debate should eliminate quality education for future environmental professionals.

One of my favorite things about Ohio is the vast diversity across a relatively small state. North to South, East to West, urban to rural, we have the entire spectrum of Americans, and environments. We have rivers, coasts, swamp, bog, mountains, savannah, and one hundred percent of it is impacted by natural and unnatural variation in the environment. Without acknowledging climate change, students in industries beyond natural sciences will be impacted. Environmental engineers won't learn how to futureproof their projects, urban planners will not account for rising water levels in Lake Erie, doctors will not learn that increasing temperatures and rates of harmful algal blooms make us sicker and more vulnerable. While my education would be entirely illegitimate without the acknowledgement of this scientific phenomena, I fear the education of others may downright endanger future Ohioans. Allowing education on the scientific principles regarding climate change, and acknowledging that the debate on human responsibility is one with a variety of opinions from a variety of stakeholders is the best form of this particular section of the bill in my opinion. This allows for Ohio students to remain up to date with current science, while still giving space for legitimate inquiry and opinion on responsibility and stewardship.

As a student and future natural sciences professional, I believe the passing of this bill in its current form will threaten the quality of natural science degrees offered in Ohio universities, and weaken those in areas that face the impacts of climate change. While you may have preexisting beliefs on the topic, I hope you will trust and hear from experts on the environment and environmental education before rendering your decisions. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on this bill. Thank you.