

Testimony of Kara E. Barr, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18, 2023

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

My name is Kara Barr and I am a professor of History at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), where I have taught for 8 years. I do not represent BGSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

In my 8 years at BGSU, I have taught the Early American history (to 1877) survey course dozens of times. Although I teach about numerous other topics, I have long been convinced that American history is the most significant and relevant to our students. That SB83 focuses on the teaching of American history above all other concerns is a clear indication that the Ohio legislature shares my belief. We further share the view that the way we teach the history of this country is crucial to determining its future. And we share the view that the classroom is a sacred space for learning that must be cherished and protected.

Taking these shared beliefs as a common ground to begin my testimony, I want to offer what my experience in the classroom teaching American history has taught me. I have learned that the importance of history, especially American history, is less about dates and names and facts, but more about the story we tell. Our country's past is rich with the same elements that make up the most meaningful human stories—triumph and struggle, tragedy and success, unlikely heroes and flawed leaders. By sharing this story in all its richness and complexity with students in the classroom, we equip them with a powerful tool as they step into their role as American citizens: confidence in the American promise.

HB83 offers us an American history which is limited in scope, told in shades of black and white rather than in a rich spectrum of colors. It does so out of fear that allowing professors like me the liberty to tell the entirety of the American story will somehow teach students to doubt this country and its values. *I testify with certainty that the opposite is true.* A citizen who understands that their country and its values can persist even when its leaders are less than perfect is a citizen who will remain deeply committed to the success of this nation and its democratic institutions. A citizen who sees that a temporary failure to live up to the American promise is not a total collapse of the American Dream is a citizen who can look to the future of this nation with optimism.

I am glad that the Ohio legislature shares my belief in the importance of American history, and I thank the Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and the entirety of this committee for their time and attention.