

Testimony of David Pereplyotchik, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18th, 2023

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

My name is David Pereplyotchik and I am a professor of Philosophy at Kent State University, where I have taught for 10 years. I do not represent Kent State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I am strongly opposed to SB83, both in spirit and in letter.

The spirit of the bill is to protect free speech, but its effect will be the exact opposite, stifling productive discussion in the classroom—including about the topic of free speech itself, which cannot be discussed without mentioning the “divisive topic” of the rise of fascist hate groups in our country.

The letter of the bill is likewise flawed beyond repair. The range of “specified concepts” that faculty would fear teaching if this bill were passed is not delineated in any way. One suspects that no principled delineation is even possible here. As the bill stands, the examples given include such concepts as “sustainability”, which is a core topic in the Environmental Ethics courses that I teach, and in related STEM fields. These are popular courses, relating timely and highly important material to students who are actively seeking it out. The only way someone can see this topic as sufficiently controversial to be ruled out of discussion in college classrooms is if that person was unconvinced of the reality of anthropocentric climate change, or of its devastating consequences, *and* they held themselves to be infallible on this topic. This is an absurd position. Such a person, far from being infallible, is uninformed about the debate (or worse), out of step with scientific findings, and inappropriately confident about their own understanding. No such person should be in the position of dictating what professors can say in the classroom. Indeed, no such dictate could be consistent with academic freedom, which is a pillar of the freedom of expression that this nation and its citizens prize so dearly.

For these reasons, and the many others that my colleagues and other concerned citizens will surely point out, I believe that this bill should be rejected. It is a profoundly anti-democratic piece of legislation, serves no just cause, and has chilling implications for the direction in which this State is headed.

Sincerely,

David Pereplyotchik
Associate Professor
Department of Philosophy
Kent State University