

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to send in a testimony. My name is Aidan Walker, and I am a third-year student at Kent State University who is currently majoring in advertising and minoring in communication studies. As a result of my experiences as a college student and the stories I have learned from others, I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

This bill may come across to you as an equalizer of sorts in its language that discusses ideas of intellectual diversity and anti-indoctrination; however, when considering the implications of this bill, it presents too broad of a standard yet too narrow of an ideology. It denies any sense of intellectual discussion by eliminating or neutering any notion of controversy. How are we, as students, supposed to learn about the world we inhabit and challenge our perspectives without the slightest bit of controversy, especially when considering how subjective “controversy” really is? My classes have encouraged people to speak on any perspective for any given topic, and while I’ve certainly disagreed with classmates in the past, the existence of a discussion at all allows me to reconsider and strengthen my own views because I can more thoroughly understand opposing viewpoints. It’s an educational experience, and I both worry about the safety of students if the only way to express our views is in unmoderated settings.

I implore you to ask yourself whose perspective you are upholding in this refusal of “controversial” topics and diversity training. Is it one that’s complacent with the status quo? Who defines this comfortable status quo? It’s not everyone. Individuals live rich, intricate lives that shape their worldviews, yet this bill can destroy discussions of this vibrant yet flawed world we live in because a student’s own lived experiences or expression of their identity, whether personal or cultural, can be deemed controversial, and a lack of diversity training leaves others ill equipped to handle what exists beyond themselves. Is this bill truly going to prepare us for the “real world,” or does it encourage us to procrastinate on that next step?

I value my education. I value the education of my peers and future generations of college students. My education has allowed me to see the context of the world we live in, to see why people take action, ranging from joining protests to clicking on an advertisement, and to see how I fit into our complex society. It provides me with hope for the future because I can more thoroughly understand my position, rather than living in an isolated, comfortable, and contextless space that leaves me disconnected to others.

I worry that future students may not receive the same level of educational care that I received because of actions like this bill. I only learned of this bill recently, so my arguments may not be as thorough as others, but I wanted to take the time to express, from a student perspective, how detrimental I believe this bill could be to the future of education in Ohio. Please consider our futures.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.