

April 18, 2023

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

Thank you for allowing me to share my written testimony. My name is Elizabeth Rockwell. I am a new resident of Ohio, having moved here from West Virginia to complete a doctoral degree in musicology. My undergraduate degrees are in music and women's studies from West Virginia University. While new to the state, I have been excited to consider Columbus my new home and am devastated by the proposal of this legislation. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Senate Bill 83 is a threat to higher education in Ohio and sets a dangerous precedent for academic institutions across the country. The college experience for students should embrace diversity, foster a sense of belonging, and allow students to explore their interests in an environment that represents global perspectives and lived experiences. Positioning this bill as an "enhancement" act is paradoxical, as it would attack academic freedom that will harm students, harm higher education, and harm the state. Instead of promoting free speech, this bill will silence it, and punish those who wish to understand the complex systems of power and uncomfortable truths of our nation. Instead of trying to learn from our past and better ourselves as individuals and as a culture, this bill will oppress marginalized groups and idolize perpetrators of bigotry.

The disastrous impact that Senate Bill 83 will have on high education is immeasurable. Restricting instruction on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in colleges and universities only sends the message that hate speech is permitted, while embracing differences and lived experiences is not. You demonstrate to a number of social identity groups that their voices, and their votes, do not matter. It has been proven time and again that increased DEI can drive innovation and promote success for adulthood and in the workplace—for example, Harvard Business Review cites a study that found in firms with "two-dimensional" diversity (meaning diversity in both social identities and in skills), they are 45% more likely to grow in the market and 70% more likely to capture new markets (<https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>). According to research by the Century Foundation, 96% of major employers find it valuable when employees can work with others from diverse backgrounds (<https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/?agreed=1&session=1>). These studies are only a few of the overwhelming amounts of scholarship that supports to benefits of diversity in the classroom. With this in mind, it is detrimental to students to remove conversations surrounding race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and religion from the classroom. We as humans do not exist in a vacuum. Our education is meant to prepare us for the 'real world', and the 'real world' is having these conversations. Students thrive when they have equitable access and opportunity to have honest dialogues about important issues.

I am from a small town in southwestern Pennsylvania, where I was told how and what to believe. When I attended college just 30 miles away, my entire worldview was expanded. If it weren't for my college education, I would not have a fraction of the opportunities to collaborate, advocate, and learn in the ways I do now. Having a space in college to understand worldviews outside of

your own creates better citizens, improves interpersonal relationships and skill, and prepare students for success outside of education. When you take away these opportunities, you lose out on informed citizens who give back to their communities. I came to Ohio to attend an institution that is known for its impact, opportunities, and reach, but my time here would be useless if this bill were passed—the very core of my education, scholarship, and research would be destroyed. I can guarantee that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of students like me, whose education would be severely devastated by this legislation. You will drive away massive amounts of students and educators who want to make a positive impact on the world, but will be unable to do so in this state if this bill is passed. Please consider who this bill impacts, and how it will do so.

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

Thank you,

Elizabeth Rockwell