

Scruta S.B. 83 testimony

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Molly Scruta. I grew up in Ohio; I have been an educator for over fifteen years in two different countries and languages, and I work in DEI at a regional campus of an Ohio public university serving many first-generation college students. I am also a second year Political Science PhD student. I am firmly opposed—in the clearest possible terms—to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Since we're here to discuss facts as they relate to this bill and the students whom we serve, I'd like to begin with some data to address some of the DEI-related components of this bill.

In January 2022, Hanover Research, a leading provider of research and analytics for thousands of organizations and companies worldwide, surveyed more than 1,000 undergraduate students around the U.S. about their perceptions of DEI at their public and private colleges and universities. For the survey, references to the term "diversity" encompass a wide range of identities, including race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, religions, ability, and socioeconomic status.

The survey findings highlight how student experiences differ across populations and across institution types (such as two-year and four-year institutions). They provide a snapshot—at a national level—of how college students view their institutions' support for DEI, including diversity in coursework, respect for different identities, and developing a campus climate that fosters belonging, safety, and support for all students.

Diversity and equity priorities are important to a clear majority of students. Of a wide range of DEI-related priorities, ensuring a welcoming and safe environment for diverse students ranks highest. In fact, 88% of students consider it important for higher education institutions to prioritize funding for programs and resources that support historically disadvantaged student subgroups and 90% agree it is important to increase recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds.

I have had the great honor to serve thousands of students at my home institution during the past five years working in DEI. I derive great joy from interacting with students, hearing their stories, affirming their dreams, supporting them through challenging times. I advise and work with student affinity groups, connect students with resources, and facilitate challenging conversations around identity, power, privilege, and other topics in classrooms. I train up-and-coming student leaders, and there is no feeling more rewarding than watching those students go on to accomplish great things. Each year, I find that students are more well-versed in inclusive leadership than the year before. Students are eager to share their experiences and stories, to tell their OWN stories.

Speaking of telling our own stories, I'd like to share some qualitative feedback about our DEI-related discussions that I've gathered directly from students via an anonymous survey following

each discussion that I facilitate—we've served hundreds of students just this year, so this is a small sampling:

It opened up a new perspective of my peers.

I really enjoyed the workshop! It was the first time many of us really talked during the seminar and I liked hearing my peers' points of view :)

It was a good experience to learn about different privileges I never thought about

It brought up a lot of emotions, in a great way!

Great conversations and I got to hear people's opinions

I liked the topics discussed and it was good learning about things I wouldn't think about

It went very well and opened my eyes to a different perspective

very much needed discussion

Loved the experience and the activities! I felt very included about sharing my experiences in life but didn't feel forced to share anything.

This was a very great activity to highlight the concept of implicit biases and recognize that we all have them.

I loved the activity that we did in class today!

I really enjoyed being a part of this workshop.

I really enjoyed learning more about my identity that I've never thought about before

52 out of 65 comments on (anonymous) feedback survey were positive, with 10 blank or "not applicable" responses and three negative responses.

As with the Hanover higher education DEI survey, the balance—when you actually ask students what they think about DEI—tips overwhelmingly towards favoring diversity, equity, and inclusion work. DEI work—including affinity groups, programming, and academically rigorous discussion and programs—is both needed and desired. It may make some of you uncomfortable, but I encourage you to reconsider whether that is enough to merit the damage that this bill will do to Ohio, its students, and academic freedom.

Senate Bill 83 in many ways stands at odds with the truth, and that truth is this: students, who are the future of this country, value DEI and intellectual freedom. Let them tell their own stories. Let the experts continue to do this work that produces responsible, well-informed citizens based on data-informed research.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.