

Testimony of Catherine Quatman-Yates, DPT, 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 Catherine Quatman-Yates, and I am a professor of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and Physical Therapy at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for six years and also served as an educator, mentor, researcher and student at two other Ohio-based institutions of higher education (University of Toledo and University of Cincinnati). I am directly involved in the research, education, and delivery of health care professional services and have been for over 16 years. I do not represent The Ohio State University or any of my prior institutions, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I would like to first specifically comment on the critical need to include and require Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) courses and trainings for students, faculty, and staff. From my perspective, requiring institutions to affirm their commitment to intellectual diversity and free speech, while simultaneously prohibiting them from mandating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) courses for students, faculty, or staff, creates an inherent contradiction in the proposed legislation. DEI courses play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive learning environment that welcomes students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds. By encouraging the exploration of various perspectives and experiences, DEI courses strengthen intellectual diversity, promote critical thinking, and contribute to personal and professional growth. Moreover, DEI courses provide the necessary framework to address systemic inequalities and biases that persist in society—especially in the context of health care. These courses empower individuals to recognize, challenge, and dismantle prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, both in academic settings and health care settings and beyond. By denying the importance of DEI courses, the proposed legislation risks perpetuating discrimination and undermining the very goals of intellectual diversity and free speech it claims to uphold. They also help learners find ways to respectfully and effectively thinking critically about, dialogue with others, and generally communicate about DEI-related concerns. DEI courses should be recognized as vital components of a comprehensive education that promotes intellectual diversity, free speech, and a more equitable society. Any legislation that undermines their value is detrimental to the collective growth and progress of our educational institutions and society at large.

To not have these courses as required elements is detrimental to the advancement of critical thinking skills in general and having an appreciation of the types or resources, consideration, and impact of considering DEI elements for better or for worse. People do not inherently have a self-awareness or natural appreciation to know what they do not already know. This lack of self-awareness can result in great harm to individuals and society. One example of the harm caused by someone who is ignorant about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) considerations is systemic discrimination. Through systemic discrimination social, economic, and political systems and structures can perpetuate inequalities and disadvantage certain groups of people.

For instance, imagine an employer leader in an industry that necessitates a degree in higher education but who is not well-versed in DEI considerations and does not prioritize creating an

inclusive workplace. This employer may not be aware of systemic discrimination elements and therefore be at risk for engaging in creating and perpetuating unequal opportunities for hiring, promotion, and pay to people from different backgrounds. They may not accommodate diverse needs and perspectives, and may not address incidents of harassment or discrimination. As a result, employees from marginalized groups may feel excluded, undervalued, and unsupported. This can lead to low morale, high turnover, and decreased productivity. Moreover, the impact of such discrimination can extend beyond the workplace and into broader societal inequalities. This employer leader then engages in behaviors unknowing that results in great harm and law suits all because they did something harmful unintentionally.

To me, there is no harm in requiring and sharing information to allow individuals to consider and decide how they personally will act on the information. In contrast, there is great harm in not requiring exposure to potential resources and information that can inform and support learners' abilities to critically think and act in more inclusive ways.

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