

Testimony of Stephanie Bendinelli, Doctorate of Physical Therapy
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 19th, 2023

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

My name is Stephanie Bendinelli, and I am a rehabilitation services manager at The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

While I can appreciate that at the levels of higher education we want to affirm and guarantee pursuit of knowledge, by passing the Senate Bill 83, we are restricting that pursuit of knowledge to only specific concepts and ideologies about which the creators of this bill believe are worth learning. Within higher education, it is of the utmost importance that we create safe spaces for students and faculty to be able to discuss, debate and comment on “controversial beliefs and policies” for higher learning to occur. If a student is not encouraged to challenge the status quo, then how does that promote growth and development, which is at the center of the mission of higher education? By allowing and requiring individuals to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion, we will continue to create spaces of belonging where all individuals are respected and valued. Chair Cirino, wouldn't you hope that all thirty-seven of your grandchildren grow up in a world where they are respected and valued?

You were quoted to say, “This legislation [Senate Bill 83] is meant to ensure students get what they pay for – a world-class education that will give them top value in the workforce and the tools needed to help them succeed in life.” Are you saying that you believe teaching anything about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging is subpar education? Do you believe that individuals will be less hireable in the workplace if they are taught about diversity, equity and inclusion? I can tell you as an employee of The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center, two of the core values of this organization are diversity and inclusion. As a hiring manager, I will always hire an individual who has core values that align with this organization. So I strongly disagree with your statement, Chair Cirino, that Senate Bill 83 gives individuals top value in the workforce – it actually makes an individual less hireable by taking away their abilities to discuss, debate and comment on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Members of the higher education committee, I implore that this Senate Bill 83 goes no further. Not only would this be a disservice to our current faculty and students by passing this bill, it would be doing a disservice to future generations. Please ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging continue to stay at the core values of our higher education institutions.