

April 18, 2022

**OH SB 83**

**Opponent Testimony**

**The Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee**

**Shwetha Bindhu, First-Year Medical Student**

Dear Chair Jerry C. Cirino, Vice Chair Michael A. Rulli, Ranking Member Catherine D. Ingram, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Shwetha Bindhu, and I am a first-year medical student at Case Western Reserve University **testifying in strong opposition of the *Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act***. My testimony is strictly my own and does not represent any entity or organization in the State of Ohio.

As a graduate of University of Cincinnati, the caliber of education in this state is a source of pride for me. I agree that intellectual diversity, freedom of thought and expression in independent intellectual inquiry, transparency in education, and maintaining healthy faculty working conditions are key for the success of Ohio state educational institutions. However, I vehemently disagree with many of the ways these aims are achieved in this bill.

Higher education should be a safe place where students can learn about any aspect of the world they desire. If we ban “controversial” discourse, we are preventing intellectual and personal growth, in addition to key analytical skills. Additionally, these topics are integral to multiple degree programs (such as climate change literature for environmental studies and foreign policy for international relations). Without formal education, Ohio graduates will be at a disadvantage when applying for employment or graduate programs that necessitate this experience and knowledge. Moreover, censoring topics in a classroom setting—a place meant to sow knowledge—not only violates our First Amendment rights.

We live in a world that is filled with people of different ethnicities, races, genders, cultures, and abilities. To understand how to navigate that world with respect and awareness, we need an education that gives students opportunities to learn freely. To limit discussion of topics such as foreign policy, climate change, and abortion, we are condemning future generations to live in a bubble that isolates them from the rest of the world.

Ohio cannot advocate for intellectual diversity while also banning DEI programs. These trainings prepare students and employees to understand and respect each other in regard to core beliefs, thoughts, and actions. People come to Ohio universities from different cities, states and countries, with varying exposure to different groups of people. DEI programming can foster a

sense of community and acceptance regardless of differences, which is integral for building a cooperative work and learning environment. These interactions have taught me and my peers so much about humility and compassion, qualities that are essential in the medical profession and any other career.

While I understand the importance of professors being present to teach their students, I also believe professors who are paid appropriately and work in a supportive environment are capable of being better teachers. While striking takes professors away from their teaching time, we should acknowledge and improve upon their reasons for doing so. I fear that banning this bill would deter distinguished professors from teaching at our universities and detract from the quality of education offered to our students. As an applicant five years ago, the accolades and experience of University of Cincinnati's faculty was exciting to me, and I imagine this is a common sentiment for many prospective students today.

This bill should be focused on improving higher education in Ohio, drawing more students and faculty into our wonderful state, yet I believe it will do the very opposite of this. Passage of this bill would be overall detrimental to Ohio students, which is why I urge the committee to **vote NO on SB 83**.

Sincerely,

Shwetha Bindhu