

April 18, 2023 Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

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TITLE: Student

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BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 83

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Emily Siderits. I am a first year journalism and media & communications major at Miami University. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

I understand the intention of this bill is to “ensure Ohio’s students are educated by means of free, open and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth.” But I fail to see how students can “seek the truth” if education is confined to what the state of Ohio deems as appropriate.

Banning “controversial concepts” from education is unethical. This ban will significantly increase polarization. Without a safe and open environment to learn about global issues, the spread of misinformation will only increase. How can student’s work to solve social justice issues if we’re to pretend they don’t exist? The bill states that students will be equipped “with the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance.” However, the only effective way to achieve this goal is through open discussion in the classroom, where students can form their own opinions from a multitude of different perspectives. Excluding social issues from the classroom will not make them disappear. For example, banning discussion of climate change will not stop greenhouse gas emissions’ effect on the environment. Instead, you are suppressing the ability for students’ to think freely and work to create solutions.

Prohibiting training on diversity, equity, and inclusion and subsequent programs sends a dangerous message. This act tells student minority groups that a safe place for them should not exist; furthermore, it sends the message that proper education on diversity is irrelevant. This bill ostracizes multitudes of students pursuing higher education by suppressing their voices.

The consideration of this bill is deeply disturbing. As a first year in college, I worry for me and my peers' future in education. This bill will significantly compromise our experience and leave all Ohio students ill prepared to advocate, problem solve, and engage in effective discourse. In addition, it will exclude minority students by erasing educational progress made in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I ask you to reconsider passing this reckless and dangerous bill. Should this bill pass, you will rob higher education students of their time, money, and unbiased education. Thank you for your time.