

Testimony of Ajit Chaudhari, PhD  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
April 19, 2023

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

My name is Ajit Chaudhari, and I am a professor of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The Ohio State University - Columbus, where I have taught for 16 years. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I oppose SB 83 because of the potential negative impacts it will have on educating the health professionals of tomorrow. The students in my unit are being trained to be athletic trainers, dieticians, health information management specialists, medical laboratory scientists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, radiation therapists, radiographers, respiratory therapists, and sonographers, as well as the next generation of teaching faculty in all of these professions. These professions are all accredited and licensed, and the accrediting bodies all require education on controversial health topics so that these health care professionals will be able to treat the patients of Ohio in the future. Passing this bill could threaten our accreditations, and if we lose accreditations that would result in a huge deficit in new professionals ready to practice in Ohio. This deficit would be devastating – most of these fields have a major workforce shortage already, and the programs in Ohio are already unable to train enough new professionals to meet the demands that will only get larger as the Baby Boomers get older. I do not think I'm exaggerating when I ask, what would we do if someone had to wait weeks to get an x-ray? Or months to get respiratory therapy? The consequences for the health of the people of Ohio would be disastrous.

Moreover, these effects would spread far beyond just the disastrous consequences of a loss of accreditation of almost all health care professions in the state of Ohio. Students have choices when it comes to where to train, and most of the students in these professions come to Ohio State or any of the other accredited programs in the State of Ohio because they want to get a great education that sets them up to be a competent professional capable of handling anything that comes their way whether they practice in Akron, Zanesville, or anywhere in between. If they know that training in Ohio will cause them to have a significant weakness in their training, they will likely go somewhere else. Add on top of that the fact that most of these graduates get a job near where they trained, and Ohio is again potentially facing a significant inability to fill jobs in these critical health care professions.

Lastly, our students come from all over Ohio, all over the United States, and all over the world. If we want them to be the leaders of tomorrow, we need to expand their horizons by exposing them to the facts that others in the world have had different experiences and have

different needs than they do. We need to teach them to think critically and to have empathy for those they may be treating in the future. One of my professional specialties is training our students in issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Every one of our sessions begins with the encouragement to listen to understand, to discuss ideas, and to accept that everyone comes with good intentions but may fundamentally have a different viewpoint. That is what we are trying to grow. This bill, like others that have already been passed in other parts of the country, would have a chilling effect that goes against its stated goals, to encourage more discussion and diversity of ideas. We cannot understand each other better if we don't talk about our different experiences and viewpoints. This aspect of higher education is quite possibly the most important thing we will teach our students. It's one of the "soft skills" that Fortune 500 companies say they want, much more important than the "hard skills" that companies know they can train their employees to have. If the State of Ohio wants to have the well-trained workforce of tomorrow that can draw companies here and that keeps our best and brightest here, we have to teach these topics BECAUSE they are controversial.

I thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ajit Chaudhari, PhD, FACSM