

April 18, 2023

Senators,

Although I am unable to attend today's opponent testimony hearing in person, I am compelled to write in response to the proposed legislation SB83. As a faculty member and as a member of a faculty union, I find much of this bill highly objectionable.

I would first like to address the 'controversial belief or policy' list which includes among other things, as you know, "marriage", "climate change", and "diversity, equity, and inclusion". As a faculty member in the Department of Africana Studies, much of our coursework involves discussion related to issues of diversity and social justice in the U.S. I also provide my students with clear definitions of how 'equity' differs from 'equality' and we deal with these terms as we discuss the history of social justice in the U.S. Even if a revision of this bill were created that would eliminate the 'list', we know that the intent of the policy remains the same and students would be denied access to these kinds of discussions (or I and my colleagues would be in violation of what would have to become university policy).

I would also like to address the elimination of programs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion as our university has done a commendable job in recent years in addressing the needs of underrepresented groups on campus. I am always perplexed by the opposition to these three words. I would first point out that a disinformation campaign has been waged against these words and what they actually mean. In my own experience, I have heard people refer to them as 'socialist' or as part of a 'Nazi Germany' kind of agenda. Neither of these is true. The only 'agenda' that is embedded in these terms is one with which I am sure you would all agree – that each person should be valued for who they are and that because we live in a country that has had a long history of race and gender bias, there is a real need to make up for some of those well documented and historical disparities. This is why we use the term 'equity' rather than equality. I am sure you are all familiar with the image of the boys trying to watch a baseball game but their view is obstructed by a fence. All equity does is give everyone the opportunity to watch the game. The idea of diversity is actually one of the foundational elements of our country. I had thought it was a source of American pride to be one country but with diverse cultures, races, ethnicities and religions. Any restriction on this kind of programming sends a clear message not only to those employed in the institutions but also to students who are thinking of attending our institutions, that they are not welcome. They will, of course, find other places to receive their higher education – places that welcome their diversity. When they leave, they will take those dollars out of Ohio with them. Your choice to restrict DEI programs will, in fact, disenfranchise a significant percentage of those who attend our state institutions of higher education and will send them outside the state to seek academic opportunities that are less restrictive.

Finally, I would like to address the 'no strike' portion of the bill. As a member of the AAUP and as the daughter of a union member, I oppose this part of the bill in the strongest terms possible. I can understand how legislators view this as a 'win' for them, but institutional memory should

help you recall what occurred when SB5 was proposed some years ago. Trying to undermine unions who operate at state universities in Ohio will not serve those universities or Ohio well.

I would like to conclude by saying that I have taught at Kent State University since the 1980's – first as a grad student, then as an adjunct and now as a full time senior lecturer. I would also like to say that most of my higher education took place at a state university. I love what I do and I am happy to be involved in shared governance as a member of our Faculty Senate. I have worked within our DEI and I have also worked with the Student Multicultural Center that was named after a member of our department who recently passed away. I would like to be able to continue to do what I love – to engage students in critical thinking and to broaden their understanding and knowledge of important people and events in our history. In other courses, I expand their understanding of literature from diverse communities in the U.S. and around the globe. I love my work and have been rewarded for the work that I have done. I urge you to reject the restrictive nature of this bill that would fundamentally change the function of my and other state universities.

Thank you -
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