

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony today. My name is Kyle Key, and I am a lifelong Ohio resident. I am also a graduate of and current educator at the University of Cincinnati. I write this testimony as a private citizen, drawing on my personal experiences growing up in Ohio and attending Ohio higher education institutions. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

The language in this bill seems agreeable at first glance: promoting intellectual freedom, banning controversial beliefs. But as soon as I start to dig under the surface and think about the long-term impacts, I see how irresponsible it would be to pass this legislation. Who decides what "controversial" means? Isn't a merit of higher education the ability to have conversations about serious topics? (A skill, I need not remind you, that is needed now more than ever in our current public and political discourse).

And universities already grant intellectual freedom! Where else can someone go, *within the state of Ohio*, that allows them to experience so many different thoughts, ideas, and input from people of all backgrounds and experiences? Both as a student and an educator, I have seen time and again that universities do **not** tell individuals *how* to think; rather, they introduce or enhance already-present **critical thinking skills**. Universities allow for the deep learning of specific academic subjects while also providing opportunities to connect with others: people who are both similar and different from themselves.

That is what I saw in my own education. I gained the ability to have nuanced conversations: to hear the differing opinions of my peers, and to learn from them while they also learned from me. Those moments, multiplied across four or five years, allowed me and my peers to move forward toward meaningful lives: not as copies of the same individual with the same beliefs, but as fully-developed, critically thinking citizens who are able to live in the nuance, to recognize the value of meeting individuals and learning from their stories—rather than having an assumption about someone because “they grew up on the other side of the railroad tracks” or “they adhere to a different religion from my own.”

Now, I’m not saying that universities are the *only* place that individuals can learn in this way and have these vital conversations: but it is a happy byproduct of large institutions that allows young adults to see larger pieces of the world, to interact with individuals different from themselves—and *then find what they have in common as humans!*

This bill, whether intentional or not, seeks to change these valuable aspects of higher education. By promoting "intellectual freedom," nuanced discussions would be removed, further increasing the political divide and ultimately harming the residents of Ohio. By removing required diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings as a vital part of learning about and supporting others (which, I should add, includes supporting rural students and Appalachian

students!), Ohio residents will only continue to build walls between themselves and their neighbors, rather than recognizing their shared similarities as Ohioans, U.S. citizens, and as humans.

I ask you to consider the points in my testimony and vote **no** on this irresponsible bill. The long-term impact of this legislation will undoubtedly harm Ohio communities, and we can all agree that when communities are in turmoil, economic standing and quality of life is sure to decline. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Kind regards,
Kyle Key