

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 today. My name is Dylan Peachock. I am a 3rd-year psychology student at The University of Akron. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House. I posit that the mission statements SB 83 requires universities to adopt in 'Issue Area 4' are incongruent with several of the 'complimentary' issue areas in the bill. The two critical statements that I would like to focus on are 4a: "The institution affirms that it will educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth." and 4b: "The institution affirms that its duty is to equip students with the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance." My concern is that the open-ended verbiage of SB 8 could lead to censoring and ignorance on essential political topics.

Firstly, I think diversity training should be required for university faculty and students. In my experience, it has helped me think about the daily struggles of other individuals and cultures. I am a white, middle-class male. Being in an environment with other students from different backgrounds than my own and, more importantly, talking about those differences has changed the way that I think. I have become more aware of my privileges and more empathetic toward others and their struggles. The key components in these discussions were the safe space provided and the ability to talk openly about our experiences. The majority of the time, this led to many controversial topics where individuals shared perspectives about a litany of subjects, from abortion to economic crises, and how some students had to adjust their attitudes when dealing with police officers. In that scenario that was discussed, a student told another that if they were concerned for their safety, they should have filmed an interaction with an officer. Still, the first student, a black female student, mentioned that if they had reached into their pocket, the authority might have seen it as reaching for a weapon and escalated the situation. While the possibility may have been hypothetical, it shows the difference in perspective and what other people have to concern themselves with.

Secondly, the scrutiny of syllabi and an institution's affiliation with controversial topics. It is impossible to have these types of conversations unattached from these. This class was taught by a professor that was appointed by the university to teach the class. They cannot separate themselves from that affiliation, even though their affiliations and isms do not wholly reflect those of the greater institution. Limiting what universities can say trickles down, and I believe that it will lead to fear of free speech instead of preventing the indoctrination of values that could be construed as malicious or forced. These conversations need to be fostered unabated by any legal oversight. Otherwise, it might lead to censoring for fear of retaliation against the self and the institution as a whole. Diversity training needs to be conducted by someone with expertise on the subject. More often than not, leaving students to their own devices will lead to ignorance, in my personal experience. Still, it is difficult to separate an individual from their own perspectives and biases and have a productive conversation with a lasting effect. It is important to embrace those perspectives and highlight these biases to understand the lens through which you are receiving the information. In doing that, my professor offered more to us than most sources I have found on my own.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.