

41ST HOUSE DISTRICT

LUCAS COUNTY

COLUMBUS OFFICE

VERN RIFFE CENTER

77 SOUTH HIGH STREET 11TH FLOOR

COLUMBUS, OH 43215-0253

PHONE: (614) 466-1418

REP41@OHIOHOUSE.GOV

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Vice Chair Criminal Justice,
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State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on Senate Bill 83.

I am Representative Josh Williams and I currently serve as a freshman legislator in the Ohio House of Representatives. In addition, I am a practicing criminal defense attorney and a college professor at Adrian College in the undergraduate Criminal Justice Department.

I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 83 because this legislation is needed to protect not only faculty but most importantly, students.

As a faculty member and recent law school graduate, I have witnessed the decline of open dialogue on college campuses firsthand. Going into my first year of law school, I had a strong impression of what my environment would be like. To me, college was supposed to be a place where young aspiring professionals and students could speak freely and critically, putting good and bad ideas to the test by the process of debate. Instead, I found my college career to be far different from what I had expected. Instead of a culture of dialogue and debate, I found higher education was primarily concerned with conformity and indoctrination, snuffing out any voices that cut against the narrative.

In one of my first classes of my post-graduate career, I made the mistake of speaking out in good faith on a controversial subject. During a discussion in a law school course on Administrative Law, I commented that our nation should not adopt an open-border policy, a common-sense declaration in my point of view. However, this honest expression of a commonly held belief precipitated a barrage of discrimination against me, led by one of my own professors. Responding to my comment, a tenured faculty member at the University of Toledo College of Law replied to a Facebook post of mine that my views reminded him of the Nazi party in Germany. Encouraged by this professor, classmates felt they could attack me as well, calling me a Nazi, a slave trader, an affront to my race, and an Uncle Tom. One student would not even address me by my name while speaking to me directly or talking about me to other students. He would simply ask them "have you spoken to the Nazi today?"

My experience in the classroom is not unique. Situations like these arise whenever the narrative that is being taught by universities is challenged, and the threat of confrontation and being ostracized is often enough to stop open discussion in its tracks. From that point forward, I was aware that there was a price to pay for free expression on college campuses.

77 SOUTH HIGH STREET, COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215-6111

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As an active alumnus of Toledo Law and as a current college professor, I have also witnessed instances of discrimination against faculty in hiring and disciplinary practice. In keeping with DEI hiring practices, universities are using prior course study that does not relate to the courses taught by the prospective faculty member and categories of identity as a substitute for professional merit. The practice of hiring those that suit the ideological agenda of universities should not be allowed to continue, those candidates with the professional merit for the position should always be given preference for the benefit of the students. Moreover, outspoken faculty members are also punished for expressing opposing views just as students are. I have personally been warned that I will be blocked from advancement in the space of Higher Education for expressing opinions widely accepted outside of academia.

Opponents to this Senate Bill 83 claim that this legislation will censor students and faculty and end free speech on campus. This could not be further from the truth. In reality, there is a de-facto censorship regime on college campuses *now*. This bill reverses these policies and opens new avenues for transparency and accountability. For instance, faculty will be evaluated by their students based on the classroom bias in addition to the quality of their instruction. Most importantly, Senate Bill 83 addresses the issue foundationally by requiring institutions of higher learning to reorient their values to support open intellectual inquiry. Under this provision, universities must adopt a mission statement that enshrines these values and acknowledges that their financial support is tied to their commitment to these principles.

In closing, I ask the members of this committee to consider the state of affairs in universities today: is rigorous intellectual inquiry being encouraged? Do students on both sides of the aisle feel encouraged to speak their mind on hot-button issues? As my experience has shown, this is not the case. By doing nothing to support intellectual diversity on campus, we tacitly support intellectual tyranny in our most prized institutions.

For the sake of our students and faculty, I urge the honored members of this committee to vote yes on Senate Bill 83.