

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education
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The Ohio State University

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mia Potenzini, I'm a lifelong resident of Worthington / Columbus and am completing my undergraduate education at The Ohio State University this spring, with degrees in Public Affairs and French and Francophone Studies. I have served as a senator representing off-campus students in our Undergraduate General Assembly. Today, however, I am simply writing as a student of a higher education institution, making me an expert on the issues that this bill is attempting to tackle. I am writing in stark opposition to this bill, specifically the frankly authoritarian restrictions it would place on free speech in the classroom as it relates to "controversial topics". I wish I could be there in person to speak on this issue I feel so passionate about, but I am almost always preoccupied being a student, immersed in the rich learning environment this bill has deemed problematic.

I want to start off with the assumption that students are being "indoctrinated" in the classroom. Having sat through over 120 credit hours worth of classes at tOSU, I can confidently say I could not guess almost any of my professors political affiliations or beliefs. They are merely a conduit for the agreed upon curriculum set forth by each college. As a Public Affairs major, my classmates and I often talk about how surprisingly apolitical our conversations in class are. We are constantly told, "you are analysts, not advocates." Professors' jobs are to set forth the facts, encourage students to think critically about them, and then to establish an argument that is well researched and backed up by evidence. My professors have only ever encouraged diverse viewpoints and opinions, so long as they are able to provide the evidence.

In reading this bill, I have asked myself over and over again how exactly politicians in my state seem to know what goes on in classrooms they are not in? How do they know what conversations are being had? What indoctrination is or is not taking place? My general consensus judging by the contents of this bill is that they don't know. In banning these conversations around diversity, equity, systemic racism, climate change, etc., this state would be sending students out at a grave disadvantage into a workforce that,

regardless of any individual opinions, is diversifying and globalizing every second. This bill sets students up for failure when we inevitably confront the issues of our time outside the classroom, without being equipped with the facts to partake in the discussions that will shape our future. In prohibiting any programming that has to do with DEI, this bill is restricting the very diversity of thought and perspectives it claims to be protecting. Programs like Morrill Scholars are in place precisely to provide opportunities to students of diverse backgrounds who may not otherwise be able to afford college. Are these students not representative of the “intellectual diversity” this bill advocates for? I would argue they are.

Finally, The Ohio State University is about as “un-radical” as you can get. I have hardly been taught to even question the government institutions within which I would work as a Public Affairs major; they have taught me how to work within the system as it is. If you ask students at this university, I think many are shocked at how apolitical OSU can be in the face of any range of issues or controversies. It is almost a hallmark of this University to remain silent, often contrary to the demands of many students, on “controversial” issues, especially when it comes to demands for boycotts, divestments, collective bargaining over student worker pay and conditions, or merely symbolic recognition. If it is silence you are looking for from a university when it comes to the issues that impact its students, OSU has long been complying with that policy.

I want to note that I agree with what I perceive are the core beliefs of this bill: to encourage students, without any biased propagandizing information from a higher education institution, to experience diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and beliefs. I can not think of a place more encouraging of this than the classrooms and student organizations I have been part of at tOSU, all of which have only benefited from tough conversations around controversial topics, and the kind of consciousness of the workings of our world provided by DEI programming. I simply do not believe the authors of this bill are the experts on these issues and are consequently proposing dangerous changes that themselves go against the core beliefs of intellectual diversity.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote NO on Senate Bill 83.

I thank you again for your time.