

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

Thank you for allowing me an opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Hannah Pearson. I am a Lake county resident working in Cuyahoga county at Cleveland State University as the Collection Management & Acquisitions Librarian at the Michael Schwartz Library. As a librarian, SEIU union member, and disabled woman I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House. I completed all of my education in Ohio – I completed my Biology, BS at Cleveland State and was awarded a Masters of Library and Information Science from Kent State.

At the core of this bill is the idea that Ohio institutions of higher education should welcome all students and diversity of thought -- I could not agree more. However, the changes outlined in this bill will only make people like me, people with disabilities, feel even more unwelcome in higher education than we already do.

I've never been made to feel unwelcome in higher education as a white woman – I've never felt guilty for being white. Cleveland State requires students take at least one course on the African American experience – I took Black-White Communication in the fall of 2009. As a white person from a small rural community in southeastern Ohio, it opened my eyes to the systematic injustices faced by black people and other minorities in this country. It helped me understand the experiences of others and reflect on the ways that I interact with different social systems, but it didn't make me feel that I was personally responsible for racism or that I should be ashamed of my race. I'm a better, kinder person because of the time I spent in that class.

I was formally diagnosed with ADHD about a year ago. I've known I was different my whole life -- that I wired differently than most people. While I was in school, I struggled with procrastination, with remembering deadlines and to turn in work. I felt an intense amount of shame of how much I struggled with these basic activities and hid it from others to the best of my ability. If I did share my struggles with others, I would be told things like "Why don't you just work on things in advance?" or "Everyone struggles with that from time to time." This was crushing – if I could have worked on things in advance, I would have. I wondered if everyone's life was a secret disaster --- moldy food in the fridge, late fee after late fee, an unending parade of lost student IDs, lost debit cards, and lost shoes. As it turns out – the answer is "No"—most people do not experience what's called "executive dysfunction" to the degree that I, and others with ADHD, do.

If you're not familiar with ADHD, or Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, it's an executive dysfunction disorder characterized by difficulty directing focus, distractibility, forgetfulness, disorganization, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. There are three ways ADHD can present: predominantly hyperactive-impulsive (what people think of when they think of ADHD), predominantly inattentive (what I have), and combined-type. Because I was a little girl with the inattentive presentation in the '90s when ADHD was a "boy's disorder," I wasn't diagnosed as a child. Only recent changes in our understanding of ADHD as a lifelong condition and how it

presents in women made it possible for me to get a diagnosis and treatment. Finally, I began to make peace with what I had considered character flaws rather than what they actually were -- a fundamental difference in the biology of my brain. Now that I know I have this brain difference, that I'm what's called "neurodivergent." I've found a sense of community with others who also have brain differences. These brain differences don't have to be clinical disorders, but often people with ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, and other conditions identify in this way (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/23154-neurodivergent>).

While my race has never made me feel uncomfortable in higher education, my disability has. Once during graduate school, I forgot to take an online exam. When I asked the professor if I could take the exam after the deadline, he allowed me to, but his email made me feel so ashamed that I cried. "Just read the syllabus!" is not the helpful advice one might think. Because of course I had read the syllabus, I'm sure I wrote it in a planner, but for whatever reason my brain did not retain that information. I considered dropping out of grad school, but my family encouraged me to persevere and not waste the significant investment I had already made in tuition.

Several years later, after surviving graduate school and securing a position in a university library, there are still times I don't feel welcome in higher education. This past fall, I was helping a faculty member assess whether a computer lab would be appropriate to use as a testing location for her course. She commented, unprompted, that students who had accommodations requiring they be allowed to take a break during testing would not be permitted to take the exam with their classmates. They would have to take the test in the Office of Disability Services -- she felt they would use their break to cheat and she didn't want to have to proctor for them. I could feel my heart breaking in that moment -- is that what this faculty member would think of me if she knew I had ADHD -- that I was a lazy cheater? And those poor students... how alienating that must have been for them. Did they feel ashamed if a classmate asked why they didn't show up to the test that day? Was the faculty member this open in her disdain in front of them?

How can we address common misconceptions about ADHD and other disabilities? How can we help Ohio citizens with disabilities persist and succeed in college? I believe a big part of the solution should be education and awareness for university and state employees. Diversity, equity, and inclusion training is an essential part of this education -- a practice this bill aims to prohibit -- but without it -- how will faculty and staff in higher education know what it means to be neurodiverse? Will they know how to treat people with ADHD, autism, and other brain differences equitably? Will they continue to exclude us whether they intend to or not?

The number of children diagnosed with ADHD is increasing (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/timeline.html>). This means that the number of college students diagnosed with ADHD will also increase over the next several years as those children become young adults. Young adults with ADHD are less likely to enroll in college, and are far less likely to hold a 4-year degree (<https://chadd.org/about-adhd/long-term-outcomes/>).

In Ohio, 10.4% of children currently have an ADHD diagnosis. That's around 270,201 kids (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OH#>). If this bill becomes law, how many of those

kids will eventually drop out of college because university employees were not permitted to be trained on neurodiversity?

I hope you will consider voting no on this bill. It will actively harm young Ohioans with disabilities and negatively impact their ability to successfully complete a college degree and receive the associated economic benefits.