

Testimony of Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, PhD  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
May 17, 2023

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

My name is Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, and I am a professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Central State University, where I have taught for 4 years. I do not represent Central State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

While there are aspects of the bill that I believe could be beneficial, there are many more aspects that are detrimental to faculty, staff, and students in higher education. First, banning employee strikes severely limits the ability of faculty, staff, and student workers to negotiate for better working conditions and pay. As universities become more focused on finances, faculty need to be able to apply pressure for conditions that benefit students both instructionally and personally such as smaller classroom sizes, advising and mentoring requirements, and appropriate teaching assignments.

Second, intellectual diversity means having multiple viewpoints to consider. According to this bill, I can be disciplined then for talking about critical race theory or not talking about critical race theory depending on how a specific student in my class feels. While the new version of this bill states that the intention is not to prohibit faculty and student classroom discussion or teaching, it still will do exactly that. I cannot ask students to consider alternative viewpoints if I am concerned about how a specific student might react and the effect that could have on my job. I encourage my students to express their thoughts and opinions in my classroom, but part of my job is challenging their perspectives. As such, I present many different viewpoints that may or may not reflect my own. Having your perspectives challenged can be (and should be) uncomfortable, but it also fosters critical thinking skills that are vital for modern careers. I don't require students to agree with any specific viewpoint, but I always ask them to carefully and respectfully consider how others think, a fundamental aspect of higher education.

Third, requiring faculty to teach 30 credit hours per academic year leaves little to no time for the two other important components in the faculty job description – service and research. Service including participation in university and community committees and programs is vital not only for the university to function, but as a way to connect universities to broader communities. Research is essential because it brings revenue to universities that can offset costs for students. Research and grant writing to fund research are time-consuming tasks, particularly for large, multi-million dollar research projects. For many of these projects, faculty receive grants from federally and state agencies. Some of the grant money usually goes back to the university to offset administrative costs. Without the time to run these projects or to apply for these grants, the financial problems many universities already face will increase. In addition, faculty research projects provide crucial learning experiences for undergraduate and

graduate students alike. Many faculty members who manage research projects employ undergraduate and graduate students. These students not only receive funding for their participation, but they are able to develop research skills important in graduate school programs and various careers.

Fourth, banning policies designed to segregate based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in credit-earning classroom settings still prevents students from developing the awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion needed for the modern workforce. In fact, the National Association of Colleges and Employers conducts a survey of employers to determine what employers want in recent college graduates. According to the most recent survey results, an awareness of equity and inclusion is one of eight career readiness competencies that employers are actively looking for when hiring (<https://www.nacweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2021/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2021.pdf>). Courses about race and ethnicity, African American experiences and culture, and gender and sexual orientation are necessary for students to have a full understanding of diversity and equity issues. Eliminating these types of courses will leave students graduating from public colleges and universities in Ohio unprepared for the modern workplace. They will be less competitive and employable than students graduating from public colleges and universities in other states where these bans do not exist.

Fifth, on a more personal note, Central State University is the only public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Ohio. This bill will make it virtually impossible for me to teach my students as almost all of my students are Black or African American and many of the courses we offered are geared toward our student population. They see and experience racism in many forms, overt and subtle, every day and want to discuss those experiences in classes designed to allow that. They see the structural racism and sexism in U.S. society in their everyday experiences when others judge them based on persistent stereotypes. To avoid discussing the existence of these societal structures is an enormous disservice to my students. Many of them have overcome incredible challenges in their journey to Central State. To ban courses about these topics is the same as pretending systemic racism and sexism don't exist in the United States, which damages my students' already fragile trust in the government and the educational system. HBCUs were created in a time when Black and African American students often were prohibited from attending other colleges and universities. We cannot hide the reality of that history in our classrooms as it is a fundamental component of why HBCUs exist. My students are proud that they attend an HBCU because they feel that they have a place at Central State where they can be themselves. They are vocal about how they have to curb their behavior in broader U.S. society because of the stereotypes and assumptions many have about them. At Central State, they don't. This gives them a freedom of expression that allows them to grow, learn, and explore. SB83 will inhibit their growth and confirm what many of them already believe – most people in the U.S. don't care about them.