

Testimony of Jennifer Suchland, Ph.D.  
In Opposition to SB 83  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair

May 14, 2023

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

My name is Jennifer Suchland and I am a Columbus resident and concerned citizen. I am alarmed to read what is being proposed in the original and revised Senate Bill 83, the Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act. I am dismayed to see the controlling hand of government dictating what can and cannot be discussed in classrooms, such as those you define as “controversial topics” in lines 183-187.

This bill presents a confused and distorted understanding of the word diversity. On one hand, it champions the idea of “intellectual diversity” (defined 188) and even requires university resources to create a rubric of evaluation (line 220) and an annual monitoring mechanism (304). On the other hand, it presents “diversity” as a something to repress: “controversial belief” (186), a banned “specified concept” (193-95).

This is a confused and distorted depiction of diversity rooted in fear and misunderstanding. You see, it is not possible to legislate away difference – of bodies, minds, of lived experiences. The reality of difference is in every molecule of this magically diverse universe – it is something to celebrate and protect. Diversity is a public good.

It is not possible the legislate away diversity, but we can create the conditions for mutual respect and in turn find shared values. Higher Education is central to building those conditions. As an undergraduate student at a small Christian liberal arts college, my worldview expanded through

awareness of diversity – ethnic and racial diversity, gender diversity, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, spiritual diversity. If I had been at a university where SB 83 was doctrine, my transformative experience would not have been possible. I would not be who I am today. I suspect I would be less compassionate, less humble, and certainly less educated.

I believe SB 83 is not an enhancement of higher education, rather an erosion and a futile attempt to work against the physics of our reality – the gravitational force of diversity. Is there an opposite to diversity, I ask you? From what I have learned, the opposite of diversity is death. I ask that you choose life, not death. Three books I read as an undergraduate student illustrate what I mean:

-Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* teaches where there is an attempt to eliminate diversity of thought, there is totalitarianism.

-Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Famine* teaches where there is monoculture agriculture and the elimination of seed diversity, there is famine.

-Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* teaches where there is an attempt to eliminate diversity of people, there is fascism.

Legislative mandates and bans will never un-diversify society but they can undermine the very social mechanisms we have to understand, protect, and respect diversity. Please choose life and vote NO on SB 83. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am now happy to answer any questions you may have.