

Testimony of Sarah Rilling, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 15, 2023

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

I'm Sarah Rilling, a professor of English at Kent State University where I have taught for 21 years as the capstone to a 38-year career teaching in state universities in 5 U.S. states. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

Linguistic diversity is a key to a successful workforce in the state of Ohio. Higher Education needs to recognize and train Ohio citizens for work in diverse workplaces, and these include work with Ohioans who are bilingual, multilingual, or who use English as a second or additional language or second dialect. In the last few years, the Ohio Department of Education has promoted and endorsed a State Seal of Biliteracy, empowering Ohio youth in studying foreign languages or those speaking English as a second or additional language. Bilingualism and understanding of linguistic diversity is key to an Ohio workforce prepared to work with international trade and intellectual partners (e.g., Timken Company) or man our diverse workplaces like Ohio poultry industry. If we cannot discuss issues of diversity in our teacher education programs, we will lose the ability to prepare Ohio children for today's diverse and global market place.

Without being able to address issues of diversity, such as bilingualism and multilingualism, Ohio teachers will not be well prepared to teach PreK-12 students in schools, which in turn will not prepare Ohio youngsters for success in higher education or careers. Ohio teachers need an understanding and awareness of diversity in their student populations, such as through learning about and appreciating temporary and permanent Ohioans from different backgrounds (immigrants, business partner sojourners with their families, international students studying at our Ohio universities, and tourists looking to visit our state). Coursework in higher education in Ohio must be able to address such diversity.

As an educator in higher education in Ohio, I have witnessed directly the positive impact that immigrants, sojourners, and international students have on Ohio, from international students spending money they bring with them for their university and living experiences, to intellectual, and cultural exchange, enriching the experience of all Ohio citizens. I pride myself on allowing and encouraging all viewpoints in all my classes, even those with a focus on diversity, and I have always allowed students to express themselves freely and respectfully, a mark of the value I place on diversity. As a case in point, I currently have both a Ukrainian and a Russian student in one KSU class, and I have allowed both to express concerns in a supportive classroom environment that values and promotes diversity of experience, opinion, and viewpoint.

I oppose SB 83. Please vote against this bill as it quashes Ohioans ability to be competitive and divergent thinkers.