

Testimony of Ilana Miller
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 Ilana Miller, and I am a student at Miami University of Ohio where I am double majoring in Social Justice Studies and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies on the pre-law track and pursuing minors in Critical Race & Ethnic Studies and Disability Studies. I do not represent Miami University, but rather I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

I recently finished my first year at Miami, and I love the classes I've been able to take so far. I get to learn about topics I'm passionate about and understand different perspectives through class discussions. Having this freedom to learn about what I care about is the reason I was so excited for college. The "controversial" topics that are limited by SB 83 affect my life and the lives of people in my community, and I cannot have a well-rounded educational experience if these topics are left out. In my classes, I learn about issues related to allyship, diversity, social justice, systematic racism, gender identity, equity, and inclusion, but my professors *never* tell me that I have to think a certain way or that I have to agree with their perspective. Instead, I get to expand my understanding of the issues and form my own opinions. By having class discussions about issues that may be considered "controversial," I develop a more well rounded understanding of these topics, and I become more prepared to be a part of a diverse workforce and to work with people who have been directly impacted by these "controversial" issues. Through these discussions, I also learn how to have respectful conversations with people I disagree with.

I've lived in Ohio my whole life. When I chose what college to go to last year, it was important to me that I stay in Ohio for my higher education. I am so grateful that I have had the opportunity to attend college in Ohio and learn from professors I respect and admire. But if this bill is passed and I am not able to take the classes I came to Miami to take or major in programs that I specifically looked for when deciding where to go to college, it is extremely likely that I will have to leave Ohio and attend college in another state, somewhere where I am allowed to learn and where the legislature believes in my ability to think for myself, even when I am learning about "controversial" issues. (While I recognize that proponents of this bill claim SB 83 does not ban courses or departments, I am extremely concerned that the vague language in this bill *will* prevent these courses from being taught or at least limit the topics that these courses can cover.) As I look ahead to law school, I hope to be able to attend a law school in Ohio, in the community where I hope to practice law one day. But I won't be able to choose an Ohio school if I know that I will not have the opportunity to learn about topics that are important to me, like allyship, social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Furthermore, as a college student who holds marginalized identities and has friends who hold marginalized identities, I know the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Requiring students to learn about these topics does not force anyone to think a certain way or have certain beliefs - we are adults and we are old enough to think for ourselves about the information with which we are being presented. Instead, DEI training makes our campuses safer for me and students like me by giving us the tools to avoid perpetuating discrimination and to respond appropriately to harmful instances of bias.

I am also extremely concerned by the part of SB 83 that would prohibit faculty from striking. While I cannot speak for my professors, as a student, I can tell you that my education improves when my professors have the opportunity to advocate for themselves and their well-being. SB 83 would take this opportunity away.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you.