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Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to oppose SB 83. While some of its provisions, such as clarifying faculty workload to make it more equitable across institutions and requiring grounding in major documents from US history, are useful, the bill as a whole is harmful to education.

I am retired from a thirty-year career as an English professor at a community college that offered four-year degrees. Every semester, I taught first-year writing and surveys of British and/or US literature in addition to occasional upper-level courses. After the college developed an online presence, I maintained a web page containing my syllabus, course schedule, and handouts, available to anyone with the link. This provision of the bill makes sense to me, reflecting my own academic practice. However,

- the bill mandates “both sides” of controversial issues such as climate change or sustainability. During my decades of teaching the research writing process and source evaluation, students read a variety of viewpoints on these issues and learned methods of distinguishing credible from non-credible sources. Given that some 97% of climate scientists have reached similar conclusions about human influence on climate change and the resulting dangers, intellectual honesty makes crediting climate denial very nearly impossible. Refusing to allow students to research a topic that impacts their lives would be academic malpractice.
- The bill states that “Institutions must not treat, advantage, disadvantage, or segregate any faculty, staff, or students by membership in groups defined by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.” Among the student organizations on our campus were the Campus Christian Fellowship, College Republicans, and College Democrats. Those organizations by their very nature were ideologically segregated. Does the legislature actually want to prevent students from forming clubs based on their intellectual affinities?
- The bill also bans training in which “An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.” While I realize that this section specifically refers to mandatory training for employees, in some states, similar language has been applied to classroom materials. I taught 19th-century American literature classes that included the works of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, works that frequently caused discomfort among students who realized without prompting that quite ordinary residents of our border areas likely worked to returned enslaved people to their owners and that some churches supported this practice. Are we to ban these writers who influenced the course of American history because their words cause distress?

This bill is ill-considered and needs to be defeated.