

Testimony of Fabio Polanco, M.F.A.  
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:

My name is Fabio Polanco, and I am a professor of Theatre at Kent State University. Prior to that, I taught at Ashland University for many years. I do not represent Kent State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

There are many issues with SB83. It is a threat to collective bargaining. This is not just a threat to faculty but sets a dangerous precedent for all organized labor in Ohio. The bill will eliminate the right to strike and to negotiate important terms of employment including performance reviews, tenure, and retrenchment. It opens the door to even further erosion of worker rights. It would increase the already heavy workloads of Kent State's full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty on 9-month appointments. This would render KSU non-competitive in its efforts to attract and retain outstanding faculty from throughout the nation and world. By seriously infringing on research time, it would also hamstring KSU's ability to maintain its recently achieved R1 status. This R1 status is not only a major achievement for KSU, but a feather in the cap of the state of Ohio and a beacon to outstanding students, entrepreneurs, and corporations from throughout Ohio and the nation looking for top of the line education and innovation. In short, this bill would have a significant cooling effect on the recruitment and retention of students and corporations to the state.

The bill unequivocally censors the university's speech, particularly in reference to the subjects of systematic racism, sexism, and/or discrimination based on LGBTQ+ status, allyship, social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability. This is problematic on many levels. It flies in the face of the notion of free speech and liberty. It also hampers the university's ability to offer and develop popular programs that have the potential to attract students to KSU and the state. In my area alone, we would not be able to provide instruction in the growing field of sustainable theatre practice and we would not be able to prepare our students to navigate the indisputable diversity that exists in the world and that they will encounter in their careers. It would also signal to many that they are not welcome. We will lose those students, we will lose their tuition dollars, and we will lose them as potentially lifelong contributors to our state's economy.

This bill will have a chilling effect on faculty and academic freedom. This bill will lead to censorship. Faculty are content experts and students pay to receive and explore the fullness of that content. They do not pay to hear a self or externally censored version that will not prepare them to succeed in their disciplines. Without *all* the quantifiably factual and supportable content, students will be ill-prepared to succeed.

If this bill passes, many students will not come, and many will not stay. We will lose them and the revenue they bring to Ohio to neighboring states ready to take them. I have already heard from both college and high school students who say they do not want to go to school and then remain to live in Ohio because of legislation like SB83. Legislation that is poised to limit their growth and squelch their success. They are our future. We need to attract them not dissuade them.