

Testimony of Haidy Kamel, Ph.D.

Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 15th 2023

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

My name is Haidy Kamel, and I am an associate professor of chemistry at Cuyahoga Community College where I have taught for 12 years as a full-time faculty. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I believe that Senator Cirino's motivation for sponsoring S.B. 83 is to make institutions of higher education in Ohio places where everyone can be heard, and where no one is pressured to assert in something they do not believe in. However, this bill will not achieve what Senator Cirino desires. In fact, this bill truly fails to understand what we do in the classroom, and the complexities of institutions of higher education. I'm afraid the substitute version of S.B. 83 will **only hurt students**, and the public institutions of higher education in the state of Ohio.

The bill attempts to legislate and set policies for "intellectual diversity". This policing is infringement on the academic freedom of the faculty. Although the language of the bill does not prohibit faculty from instruction, or debate, it is not adequate to safeguard freedom given the provision listed in page 26, and 32 of the sub. S.B.83. In addition, the bill requires institutions to discipline faculty and staff for interference with intellectual diversity rights, and still fails to provide any detail about a due process for anyone accused of interfering with intellectual diversity or inculcation.

Every institution of higher education has established guidelines for faculty evaluation which includes regular evaluations by the dean/department chair, student evaluations, peer observations, professional development, and service to the college and the community. The bill states that student evaluations should account for at least fifty percent of the teaching area component of faculty evaluation. This will create a perverse incentive for instructors to avoid challenging assignments for fear that students would give them low ratings. This is specially the case in challenging areas of science such as chemistry and physics, as well as mathematics. The bill encourages instructors to lower the bar and in very little time, we will see disturbing low standards at public institutions which will translate to high failure rate in the job market.

The bill also requires the following question in the student evaluations: "Does the faculty member create a classroom atmosphere free of political, racial, gender, and religious bias?" Without definitions or understanding what these biases look like, how does a student answer this question? and if we want students to judge whether their instructors are biased or not, shouldn't we train faculty to be aware of their conscious and unconscious biases so they can keep them in check? But the bill bans DEI training which includes bias training. Do you see the irony?

This bill undermines workers' rights. Without the right to strike, faculty and other workers have no effective resource against unhealthy or unsafe working conditions, or employer tyranny. It's always the absolute last resort that workers use to direct attention to urgent needs. In many cases, these needs affect students' learning, directly or indirectly.

I urge the committee to not advance this bill.