

Testimony of Reanne Frank, Ph.D.

Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 16, 2023

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

My name is Reanne Frank, and I am a professor of Sociology at the Ohio State University, where I have taught for sixteen years. I do not represent the Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to the revised Senate Bill 83. My position and teaching experience, however, make me uniquely qualified to comment on the bill which is clearly intended to remake higher education in the state of Ohio. While I am very clear of the political motivation to do so, having read plenty about other states either passing or attempting to pass similar legislation, I am not at all clear on the practical motivations. Passing this revised bill will weaken what is a world-class higher education system in Ohio. Why would we want to do that? Senator Jerry Cirino, in his April 4 2023 Columbus Dispatch editorial wrote that, “the purpose of Senate Bill 83 is quite simple: It ensures free expression on campus and in the classroom at Ohio’s public universities and colleges.” But free expression is already assured in the classroom at OSU. I have experienced this firsthand in my sixteen years of teaching on societal issues in both the U.S. and in other country contexts. All perspectives and viewpoints that are grounded in evidence are welcomed. Even those that are not, are evaluated against existing evidence which allows students to learn to think critically –a lifelong skill benefitting us all. Freedom of expression has always been assured in my classrooms and of those of my colleagues, many of whom I have peer evaluated over the years. It is not in danger at OSU. In fact, this bill does nothing to advance free expression and everything to suppress it. I have heard plenty from my colleagues about the unintended consequences of this bill which I believe the revised bill has attempted to address. But what of the intended consequences? Trying to limit what and how faculty teach is, as a federal judge issuing a temporary injunction against a Florida law noted, “positively dystopian.” I urge you not to drag Ohio and our esteemed institutions of higher education down this path. It may be politically expedient, but it is not practical, will weaken our system of higher education, and goes against academic independence. Let’s instead focus on supporting and expanding our world class system of higher education, not destroying it.

Sincerely,

Reanne Frank, Ph.D.