

Testimony of Tyrone Fontaine, MID, NCIDQ, IDEC
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 16th, 2023

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

My name is Tyrone Fontaine, and I am a staff member who is part of the University Communications and Marketing team at Kent State University, where I have worked for the past three years. I do not represent Kent State University, but rather am submitting testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 83, as a resident of Ohio. While SB83 is presented in a manner with intentions to diversify voices in higher education within Ohio, the language of the bill is problematic, and clearly harmful to the diverse staff, faculty and students at Kent State University.

In my own experience, as an Indigenous person in Ohio, there is still much progress to be made in eliminating racism, and reconciling with Indigenous people of this land. Kent State University recently held a forum about Indigenous Land Acknowledgement that made significant progress in this area. In addition, a number of faculty and programs at the institution are starting to include land acknowledgements in their syllabi and on their program websites. As an Indigenous person, this has been critical to making me feel welcome in my work environment.

SB 83 would impact how Kent State University, as an institution, will be able to acknowledge the past harm to Indigenous people by way of racism and colonization. SB 83, as it is written, would prohibit the institution from taking a stance that welcomes Indigenous people, such as myself. This seems at odds with the stated intention of the bill to diversify higher ed.

This intrusion of government on academic institutions will perpetuate racism and the true and documented history of this land. I strongly oppose SB83 in its entirety.

Thank you,

Tyrone Fontaine