



# children's defense fund ohio

**Opponent Testimony for SB 83**  
**Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee**  
**May 17, 2023**

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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 83.

My name is Kim Eckhart and I serve as the director of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy behind us, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to appropriate and targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. We recognize that every child contributes to the vibrancy and success of our communities and are therefore driven to ensure every child and young person has opportunities to gain the social, economic, cultural and political capital they need to flourish into adulthood and give back to their communities.

I am here because I am deeply concerned about the impact this bill will have on the children that we represent. Postsecondary education is critical to economic mobility. Thriving as an adult isn't just about earning money, but financial stability is a critical foundation. Adults ages 25–34 with high school diplomas earned \$36,600 on average compared with \$59,600 for those who had completed a four-year college degree (or higher).<sup>1</sup> Not only that, but the unemployment rate for college graduates is about half of the national average.

There are significant barriers to attaining a college degree and there are still significant racial disparities in college attainment. Among young people ages 25-29 in the U.S. who are white, 45% attained a bachelor's degree in 2021, compared to 26% of those who are Black and 23% of those who are Hispanic. College attainment among all students has increased since 1964, but the gaps between groups have widened over time, from 8 points in 1964 to 19 points in 2021. This is not the case with high school graduation rates, where the gap has closed over time.

It is imperative that Ohio maintains a climate where institutions of higher education can review data disaggregated by race and ethnicity and address these disparities directly by strategically removing the barriers that cause them. To close these gaps, institutions have created programs to support students socially and through mentorship and, for those with low-income, with

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021.

financial support.<sup>2</sup> Studies show that students report less discrimination when institutions are perceived to have a greater commitment to diversity. Programs that have been carefully developed to address these gaps are often housed in offices that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). SB83 is not as explicit as other legislation being considered by this General Assembly, (i.e. proposed amendment to HB33 referred to as HC1074) in prohibiting diversity and inclusion offices. But its intent will certainly have a chilling effect on colleges investing in these strategies.

The bill states that institutions of higher education shall 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 or provide advantage or disadvantage on the basis of membership in groups defined by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in admissions, hiring, promotion, tenuring, workplace conditions, or any other program, policy, or activity.

The negative consequences of this sweeping prohibition cannot be overstated. The intended consequences appear to be dismantling strategies to close racial disparities in college attainment, and it will simultaneously dismantle groups such as sororities and fraternities, which are based on gender, race, religious groups, and associations based on nationality.

I urge you to reject this legislation in its entirety. As a community, we should be spending our time and energy finding ways to ensure all children thrive, not dismantling the efforts to close longstanding gaps in college attainment. Thank you for your time.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices, 2016.