

May 16, 2023

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Please accept this written testimony on the matter of Senate Bill 83. I am an Associate Professor of Media and Communications at Miami University and I strongly oppose Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Higher education in Ohio has many problems that the legislature could help address. Enrollment is declining statewide. Ohio universities and community colleges have both seen a 12% decrease in enrollment from Fall 2022 to Fall 2012, according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education. Meanwhile, tuition has been steadily increasing as students struggle with debt and other financial issues. State funding support is nowhere near past levels. The disruptions caused by COVID are still rippling throughout higher education as students struggle with college preparedness, mental health, and other issues. There are substantial challenges ahead.

Unfortunately, Senate Bill 83 does nothing to address these pressing issues. Instead, these bills focus on culture war topics that have little to do with teaching and learning. These bills will politicize higher education and drive away prospective students and teachers. They do not reflect the reality of what actually occurs on college campuses.

Senate Bill 83 prohibits labor actions by faculty. This has little to do with teaching and learning, but will surely impede Ohio educational institutions from attracting and retaining talented faculty. If you believe in free markets, then how can you remove the rights of workers to take collective action to improve their working conditions?

These bills undermine the tradition of free speech in America by proposing a McCarthyite regime of reporting and thought-policing. Such measures are completely unwarranted and create a hostile environment for intellectual freedom and the productive exchange of ideas. Students cannot simply be shielded from topics and worldviews that some find uncomfortable.

Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House would send a clear signal that Ohio lawmakers do not support universities. If these laws are passed, students will go elsewhere. Faculty will leave. Our great universities will fall further into decline.

I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote NO on these shortsighted bills.

Matthew Crain