

Testimony of Kate Budd
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 Kate Budd. I am an associate professor of art, and chair of the University of Akron faculty senate. I do not represent UA but am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Sub. Senate Bill 83.

Faculty do not want to strike. I served on the Akron-AAUP leadership team for twelve years and know this firsthand. Faculty care deeply for their students and know the impact a strike would have on their learning. The only times they will consider striking are when the administration refuses to bargain or won't bargain in good faith.

The right to strike is what gives faculty equality at the negotiating table. Equality at the table results in contracts that help keep universities accountable to their academic mission, that provide stability and that make the university desirable to prospective students. To attract and retain excellent faculty, you must offer working conditions that are fair and consistent with industry standards.

UA is a case study in what happens during a difficult negotiation when faculty are prohibited from striking. In the summer of 2020, UA's administration asserted that the Covid pandemic had impacted the university's finances so badly that they had to declare *force majeure*. They planned a reduction in force (RIF) of 97 faculty.

The chapter wasn't convinced a RIF on this scale was necessary. We believed losing so many faculty would damage UA's academic mission and the negative publicity would drive students away. None of the arguments we made had any effect. We were still working under contract and were bound by a "no strike" clause. Our only hope for lowering the number of people on the RIF list was to go public.

We held rallies, wrote press releases, and saturated social media. The chapter President was interviewed by national and international news media. We organized a raucous car parade through Akron, honking our horns as we drove past the country club where many of the UA Board of Trustees hold memberships. Nothing we did brought that number down.

The contract from that negotiation was rejected by the faculty. 97 faculty were RIF'd. The chapter took the matter to arbitration and lost. Relations between the faculty and the administration were the worst I have seen in twenty-five years of teaching at UA. It was a heartbreaking situation and I have no doubt the RIF and the public fight over it drove students away.

A few months later our existing contract was ending, and we were back at the table. The administration sought to reduce compensation, raise health care costs and push for harsher retrenchment language. No one expected a good outcome.

But within a few months, the negotiating teams delivered a contract that both sides could live with, without any public ugliness. One important factor was that our contract ended during negotiations, meaning we could legally strike. The negotiating team now had some leverage and they pushed for improved shared governance language to help offset the losses to pay and healthcare. Why is shared governance so important to faculty? Administrative policies create the conditions for the academic quality of an institution. Shared governance - including the experience of faculty when forming those policies - is vital. Both sides compromised to achieve a fair contract and the chapter members voted to accept it.

Two and a half years later, faculty-administration relations at the University of Akron are good. We are working together to solve problems and faculty are consulted early on changes in policy. UA just completed an accreditation site visit from the Higher Learning Commission, and our shared governance was commended.

From the faculty viewpoint, working with this administration again is only possible because together we created a contract we could all live with. We weren't forced into a non-competitive contract through lack of leverage or arbitration by a third party. When Senator Cirino introduced Senate Bill 83, he noted that reasonable people should be able to come to an agreement without striking. But this is a pipe dream unless the two sides have roughly equivalent strength.

Removing faculty's right to strike won't lead to peaceful campuses. Faculty who are fighting for their students and their academic programs will find other ways to make their voices heard, or they will leave to go to a state that values them. True shared governance and fair working conditions are what ensures strength for higher education in Ohio. And that is why faculty need equality at the table.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill. I welcome any questions you may have.