

Testimony of Tori Haller, Student and Future Teacher
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair

May 17, 2023

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

Thank you, Senators, for granting me the opportunity to testify regarding the impact of this bill on my life. My name is Tori Haller. I am a student at The Ohio State University and a history major on the education track. Once licensed, I intend to teach history at the high school level. As such, I provide a unique perspective from both the student and educator points of view. I have already had the pleasure of speaking before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee regarding the previous iteration of this bill, and I am grateful for the opportunity to again provide testimony to this committee about the updated version of SB83.

Many of the initial concerns that I raised during my first speech are seemingly addressed in the updated version of SB83. Specifically, I addressed concerns regarding how professors' ability to competently and appropriately teach their courses would be negatively impacted by this bill. Thankfully, the new version of this bill has removed language that prohibited institutions – and thus, its professors – from even commenting on controversial beliefs and ideologies. However, the bill's requirement that professors teach multiple and divergent viewpoints on public policy issues to ensure intellectual diversity raises its own concerns that threaten the quality of student education. If support for some form of public policy has largely reached consensus within a given field, giving equal weight to opposing viewpoints gives students an

inaccurate and substandard education on these issues. Additionally, as professors are forced to spend a greater amount of time teaching unsupported information, they will be unable to cover in depth more important and necessary information during class.

Furthermore, the bill still prevents universities from endorsing or opposing any controversial belief or policy. While it is absolutely important that universities remain a bastion for both tradition and progress, universities must also be safe spaces for all students – which is, ostensibly, what this bill is trying to protect. However, by including topics such as “marriage” as a controversial belief, this bill inhibits universities’ attempts to develop these safe spaces for students. Presumably, marriage between a man and a woman is not what this bill considers controversial; instead, it is clear that this is supposed to delineate gay marriage as a controversial issue. This is rather curious, as according to the Supreme Court’s opinion currently enshrined in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, gay marriage is a constitutional right. If gay marriage’s supposed controversial nature is meant to reference Justice Thomas’ opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* that *Obergefell’s* reliance on the due process clause in the 14th Amendment was flawed, though, then interracial marriage would also be considered “controversial.” After all, *Loving v. Virginia*, the case that consecrated interracial marriage as a constitutional right, also depended on the due process clause; however, going down this road results in consequences that sound as if they came out of either Jim Crow-era America or a dystopian novel, which is a path that none of us want for our country.

This determination of gay marriage as controversial is further harmful because, as reported by the Trevor Project in 2022, LGBTQ+ teens have become increasingly vulnerable to suicidal ideation within the last three years.¹ These teenagers, without the support of their

¹ “2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health,” The Trevor Project, March 31, 2023, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>.

schools and campuses, will be much more likely to struggle in classes and find gainful employment. These students may even be stripped of support from their professors, since professors who are perceived to be “inculcating” their students to support a certain controversial belief would be a violation of this bill as well.

If I – or any educator, for the matter – are unable to adequately do our jobs or support our students, what right would we have to call ourselves teachers? And if educators are unable to faithfully do their jobs in Ohio, how will that affect Ohio’s ability to attract educational professionals – or maintain the ones they already have? As my family can attest, I have *always* maintained that Ohio is the home I intended to live, to work, and to die in. This bill, though, has forced me to consider for the first time seeking employment outside of Ohio after graduation – which is terrifying to me. I have never wanted to live anywhere else.

However, this problem is one that educators throughout the state will soon have to confront. A Cleveland news organization has reported worries that promising instructors and students will be driven away from Ohio universities by Senate Bill 83.² All of us here want the best education possible for our students, but by restricting professors’ academic judgment and the support universities can provide their students, Senate Bill 83 endangers the quality and the integrity of Ohio’s institutions of higher education. The destructive consequences of this bill’s passage would do irreparable harm to the educational system that we all wish to see thrive.

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

² Laura Hancock, “Critics wary of Ohio Senate higher-ed bill that would bar professors from striking, specify content of American history class, among other changes,” Cleveland.com, April 03, 2023, <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/03/critics-weary-of-ohio-senate-higher-ed-bill-that-would-bar-professors-from-striking-specify-content-of-american-history-class-among-other-changes.html>.

I love my state. I have no desire to leave it. But this bill seeks to destroy many of the aspects of this state that I love. It will drive me, and other teachers and students, out of Ohio. However, it is not too late to vote no on this bill in its entirety. This bill – and the wellbeing of our professors, our schools, and above all, our students – is in your hands. Let's work together to make sure that all have the chance to enjoy the opportunities that Ohio's institutions of higher education have to offer.