

Testimony of John Huss, PhD
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 John Huss, and I am a professor of philosophy at The University of Akron, where I have taught for 16 years. I do not represent The University of Akron, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

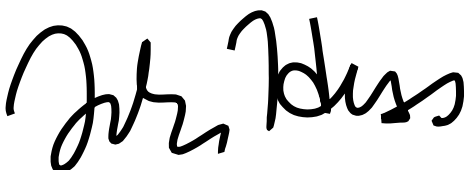
My main concern is that the bill is likely to have a **chilling effect on free speech on college campuses**, both by faculty and by students, despite its intended effect of inviting free speech. As someone with a 15-year-old son, I would like to be able to feel confident, sending him to a public university in Ohio, that a full range of controversial topics will be discussed both inside and outside the classroom, including, where relevant, clear statements of the factual status or prevailing scholarly consensus on said topics. If this bill passes in anything like its current form, I will not feel this confidence.

The biggest problem with Senate Bill 83 is that it puts public colleges and universities in Ohio at a competitive disadvantage with other colleges and universities in different states and with private colleges and universities in Ohio, all of whom are not operating under the kinds of restrictions imposed by the bill. High quality faculty will be more difficult to recruit and retain. Students will suffer as a result. The state economy will suffer as a result.

The further restrictions on unions are not welcome. Even with the current collective bargaining rights as they are, faculty are at a power disadvantage relative to administration due to management right to declare an impasse during talks, and administration being able to reject or not institute the fact-finder's report. **Faculty unions generally work with the administration, not in opposition to it, in solving the full range of problems that are addressed within the current framework of collective bargaining rights.** As you know, at The University of Akron, we recently had a massive layoff of faculty under the force majeure clause in our contract, due to financial exigencies stemming from the pandemic. One of the reasons for this was that we did not have a retrenchment clause that the administration believed they could use. In the current contract, a retrenchment policy more user-friendly for the administration was negotiated, such that we might avoid such mass layoffs of tenured faculty and in some cases even distinguished professors. The union works with the administration to come up with solutions to the full range of problems that fall within the current framework of collective bargaining rights.

Everyone I know on the faculty believes in academic freedom and is committed to freedom of speech. **Despite the intentions of this bill, it will have a negative impact on public institutions of higher learning in Ohio, and place Ohio's students at a disadvantage.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Huss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.