

Peter Wood, President, National Association of Scholars: Testimony, Ohio SB 117

My name is Peter Wood and I am the President of the National Association of Scholars. NAS is a network of scholars and citizens united by our commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in higher education. We have more than thirty-five years of experience in advocating for the principles of intellectual freedom.

The National Association of Scholars enthusiastically endorses SB 117, “Establish certain entities at Ohio State and University of Toledo.” SB 117 would create two new independent centers at Ohio State University and the University of Toledo College of Law. These independent centers, similar to the [School of Economic Thought and Leadership](#) (SECTL) at Arizona State University, would provide an institutional home for faculty and courses devoted to intellectual diversity, intellectual freedom, the core texts and great debates of western civilization, and the principles, ideals, and the institutions of the American constitutional order. The two new centers would work in a complementary fashion: Ohio State University’s new Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society would focus on general undergraduate and graduate education, while the University of Toledo’s Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership would focus on the education of lawyers—the profession entrusted with the defense of Americans’ liberties in our courts. SB 117 intelligently aims to address one of Ohio’s most urgent educational needs.

SB 117 is **necessary** because Ohio’s system of higher education, as virtually all of American higher education, has been taken over by a radical intellectual monoculture. The administrators and professors who run Ohio’s universities, even should they wish to forward the goals of these two proposed Centers, no longer know how to do so. A vital faction of the higher education establishment is actively hostile to those goals. The Centers provide vital institutional independence for reform-minded administrators and professors to pursue these goals and to establish them as a functioning, secure means to continue teaching these goals in the long term.

SB 117 is **possible**. As I have noted, the [School of Economic Thought and Leadership](#) (SECTL) at Arizona State University provides a precedent for a similar Center, and SCETL has been very successful—both in fulfilling its mission and in providing efficient administrative leadership to turn a vision into a practical reality. The Ohio Centers would also be able to draw upon the professional network of a growing number of such state Centers nationwide, including in Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. The Centers are entirely practicable.

SB 117 provides an **opportunity**. SB 117 will be among the first such Centers in the nation—and would provide the first one housed in a college of law. Ohio’s Centers would attract students from around the nation, both those hungry in general for such an education and those who wish to go on to careers in other such Centers, when their own states authorize them. Indeed, Ohio may be able to attract as permanent residents many of the excellent young students who seek an education free of the ideological blinkers that afflict the rest of higher education. Ohio’s universities will have the ability to acquire a national basis of tuition, reputation, and influence, as a first mover in higher education focused on intellectual diversity and intellectual freedom.

SB 117 will **promote reform in the rest of Ohio higher education**. Higher education’s radical monoculture depends on its monopoly power. Once students have a choice and can vote with their tuition dollars for the reformed education available at these Centers, it will provide an incentive to the rest of Ohio’s system of higher education to reform. Some timid academics will be emboldened by the Centers’ example to seek to reorient their system toward intellectual freedom. Self-interest will drive others toward reform. SB 117 will provide not only an island of reformed education in

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Ohio but also infect the rest of Ohio's higher education with the desire to cease their devotion to radical activism and to return to their true mission of education.

SB 117 is **appropriate**. The citizens of Ohio, their elected representatives, and their appointed trustees, always have shared with university administrators and faculty the right and the responsibility to defend academic and intellectual freedom. If the administrators who control institutions of higher education will not act to promote intellectual diversity, intellectual freedom, the core texts and great debates of western civilization, and the principles, ideals, and the institutions of the American constitutional order, then the public and its representatives must exercise directly the powers and duties they always have possessed. Ohio's elected representatives possess both the right and the duty to renovate the ivory tower.

SB 117 is a necessary and well-tailored means to restore Ohio's system of higher education to its better, truer self. The National Association of Scholars heartily endorses SB 117, and we urge Ohio's legislators to pass this bill and Governor DeWine to sign it.