

## SB 117 Testimony

Dustin James Davidson

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Smith, and all the members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony this morning. Speaking before you is a novel privilege, one which I intend to keep brief.

During my education at The University of Toledo College of Law, I experienced what I would call a transformative process. While there I learned all the things every law student does, including our substantive and procedural law, the history that produced it, and how to advocate effectively, both orally and in writing. But beyond all this, and perhaps most importantly, I learned how to hope. I learned how to hope for a better future for my family, and that by utilizing my degree to engage civically in my community, I might help in a small way to unify what has become an increasingly diverse, and seemingly more divided nation. This latter skill, of fostering unity amid fractured cohorts, is best learned by watching it modeled, something UT's faculty has already begun doing through the Stranahan Lecture Series.

This past semester, Judge Ho of the Fifth Circuit came to speak at the College as part of the Series. After his lecture, approximately twenty of us attended a luncheon with him, where we were permitted to ask him questions and engage in meaningful dialogue. In attendance at this luncheon was the University's Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Dilip Das.

Now, if you're familiar with the recent controversy at Stanford, and Judge Ho's response to it, you might expect that the conversation that day took a tense and negative turn. But in fact, it was just the opposite.

Vice President Das was respectful of Judge Ho, but openly asked him to explain the degree to which Originalism was tied to Christian morality. Judge Ho's response was both honest and apropos, but it wasn't Judge Ho's response that struck me. It was Vice President Das's question. I left the luncheon thinking about it, and continued to think about it for days afterward. I saw the implications of his concern, and recognized the sociocultural importance of constitutional interpretations grounded in ethics that are not explicitly Christian. I wondered what those ethical constructs might be, and began to consider where both liberals and conservatives might find ideological common ground in an Originalist jurisprudence.

But the answer to Vice President Das's question is irrelevant to my point today. His question made me think, and as a student at UT, that luncheon was the first time in my law school career that I saw someone in authority, seemingly opposed to what is commonly thought of as a conservative viewpoint (i.e., originalism), meaningfully engage with its bearers in a mutually affirming manner. Even more meaningful, was the fact that Vice President Das was engaging Judge Ho on what had temporarily become de facto conservative grounds.

I am incredibly thankful for my time at UT, but interactions like this one do not happen often enough, and I take it as axiomatic that all our institutions can be improved. I believe that budding jurists like me need hope that we can somehow find common ground amid the ideological chasms between us; that we can find ways to move forward peacefully together. The Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership proposed by SB 117 would be an instrumentation of that hope. The Bill makes explicitly clear that one of the primary purposes of the Institute is to foster and encourage exchanges like the one between Judge Ho and Vice President Das (*see* § 3364.07(B)(5)).

Because of the dialogue that day, and not the answer arrived at, I left the luncheon feeling hopeful, and thought to myself, “this is a good thing.” Today, I hope again, that you will make exchanges like that one more ubiquitous by passing this Bill.

Thank you.