

Testimony of Michael G. Aird on SB 117

Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and express my support for Senate Bill 117. Specifically, I am here to share my perspective on how the Institute of American Constitutional Thought at the University of Toledo will both enhance UT students' experience and strengthen UT in a way that will benefit all Ohioans.

My name is Michael Aird. I recently graduated from the University of Toledo College of Law in December, 2021. I started law school in September, 2017. I attended as a part-time student while also running a small business just outside of Toledo, in Swanton Ohio. Currently, I am an attorney practicing in Northwest Ohio.

Our country's ability to have thoughtful, respectful, and open debate of hotly contested ideas is at an all-time low. Unfortunately, law schools across the country are not immune from this problem. One of the Institute's main goals will be to create a rich forum for the development and competition of ideas across the political and ideological spectrum. This is needed, badly. For the marketplace of ideas to flourish, we need institutions to protect and promote that marketplace. From a law student's perspective, the creation of the Institute will result in the ability to connect and engage with intellectual leaders with whom they agree and disagree. The Institute will also provide a model for students who are tackling a controversial topic or taking a controversial stand in a *Law Review* note or other research. Ultimately, the Institute will foster stronger, well-rounded attorneys and future leaders who are ready and able to engage in the type of intellectual curiosity our state and country need to flourish.

Another important goal of the Institute will be to enrich the curriculum in constitutional studies. Currently, most of the constitutional law classes available to students are limited to teaching the nuts-and-bolts of constitutional law needed to pass the bar exam. And while that is obviously important knowledge and an important goal, something is lacking. Where did these concepts contained in the Constitution—which are vital to our country—come from? What are the philosophical underpinnings of this text? Why should we even respect the Constitution? Is it a moral document? The creation of the Institute will allow students and faculty at University of Toledo a unique forum to engage openly in these sort of questions and many more. This type of education will enlighten students to the foundations upon which our county was built and give them a toolkit to take with them throughout life as they engage as attorneys and civic leaders.

Our country is at a turning point in how we think about and consider our Constitution. Recent decisions by the United States Supreme Court have changed how we are applying our Constitution to our country's and our state's laws. For example, the *Bruen* case has affirmed the Constitution's Second Amendment right to bear arms as an individual right. The recent *Dobbs* decision has altered the types of protections available for abortion. The Constitution is as relevant to American culture and American politics now as it has ever been.

The Institute will bring these conversations, by top intellectuals and thought leaders, here to Ohio and the University of Toledo. These conversations are happening. This is an excellent opportunity to bring them to Ohio and lay the foundation for the next generation of constitutional leaders to be developed right here in Ohio. This Institute will attract students and faculty to the University of Toledo that may have never considered it before. Once here, these students are more likely to stay and elevate the practice of law in Ohio.

In short, the Institute of American Constitutional Thought will enhance the experience for future lawyers at University of Toledo, enhance the University itself, and ultimately enhance Ohio. I thank you again for your time and urge your support of Senate Bill 117.