

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

Thank you for reading my testimony. My name is Bene. I am a concerned citizen of Ohio and an educator. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83, it's sub bill version, and its companion bill in the Ohio House, HB151.

In particular, I will be speaking to the restrictions on controversial topics, on workers' rights, and the prohibition of "segregation" for orientation or graduation ceremonies that are presented in the bill.

Senate Bill 83 has the power to prevent open and honest learning about diverse identities and lived experiences, and a wide range of diverse topics, in our institutions of higher education. According to the bill, these "controversial topics" are, as I said wide-ranging, including climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion. Potential repercussions of job loss and funding loss will have a chilling effect on faculty, staff, and students who want to learn about and engage in conversations about these diverse topics.

I say it has the "power" to prevent open and honest discussion because the bill would open the door to future, additional restrictions that prevent educators from providing students with a well-rounded education so that they can, as the bill itself states, make their own, informed decisions and utilize strong critical thinking skills that will serve them well beyond their time in college. We are already seeing, in other US states, how the kinds of restrictions listed in even the sub bill version of SB 83 can lead down a slippery slope to all-out bans that disadvantage ALL of our students, regardless of their backgrounds, by limiting the knowledge and exposure that they receive to the wide range of topics listed above.

But why does that matter?

To provide just one example - According to a report by the US Census Bureau entitled "Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections from 2020-2060" (enclosed), the demographics in the US are changing and becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and will continue to do so in the future. To cite some examples, people who identify as Two or More Races are expected to grow the most quickly over the next decades, by almost 200 percent by 2060, along with Asian population, by 100% by 2060, and Hispanic population, by 93%. People who identify as Black or African American are also expected to grow, by 40% by 2060. By 2045, the data predicts that people who identify as White/non-Hispanic will no longer be the majority population in the US.

Further, if we look at Ohio, statistics from the Census Bureau on the state of Ohio alone show that between 2010 and 2020, the population of people who identify as Black or African American increased by 71,100 people (5%), people who identify as Two or More Races increased by 443,607 people (186%), and people who identify as Asian increased by 106,276 (55%), while the population of people who identify as White decreased by 4.8%, just to give you an idea (Source:

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/ohio-population-change-between-census-decade.html>).

I cite this information because the fact is, our society and world are becoming more diverse. Our students in our higher education institutions are going to be working with and for people from diverse backgrounds, both during their studies and out in the workforce. If we want Ohio to remain nationally and globally competitive economically, our graduates need to be able to appreciate diversity in its many

forms, appreciate diversity of thought, the diverse lived experiences of others, and work successfully with people from all different backgrounds!

Learning from one another, not ignoring the experiences of those who may be different from ourselves, is how we move forward as a state and as a country, not by being afraid to learn about differences in individual experiences, just because the information might be new to us. That is how true learning occurs!

Further, if in being exposed to the “controversial topics” listed above, a student feels that their views are not being heard, let’s address that with resources that already exist on college campuses, such as Ombuds offices, or mitigation resources available to all students, rather than pass a total overhaul of higher education that will bring undesired consequences, from which it will be difficult to turn back.

With regards to workers’ rights, the bill would ban strikes by employees of not only “any state institution of higher education”, but also “members of a police or fire department; Employees of any public employee retirement system; Corrections officers, as well as other groups. If we stifle employees’ voices, in any of the categories that the bill would ban from striking, then we as a state risk making Ohio less attractive for jobseekers. If we want to give all students the opportunity to receive a higher education in Ohio, then we also need the staffing power to provide that to them, without setting up policies that will disincentivize jobseekers and leave institutions with fewer human resources than is already the case.

Finally, while clarification was provided in the sub bill on the prohibition of segregating faculty, staff and students, I am still concerned that the bill is implying that certain orientations and graduation celebrations that are meant to help and to celebrate students of various backgrounds are “segregating” those students from the rest of the student body and/or excluding other students from engaging. Rather, orientation programs designed to help these students of various backgrounds feel like they belong at the institution actually help increase retention of those students at Ohio colleges and universities, and graduations that celebrate diverse groups of students are just that, celebrations of the great accomplishment that is completing a degree. In my experience, students participating in these orientations and graduations greatly value the support that these events provide. And in my experience, students, faculty and staff from across the institution have been openly invited to attend these events if they so choose, thus not being “segregated” events that prevent attendance from members outside of the target demographic.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony.