

Opponent Testimony for 117
Workforce and Higher Education Committee
June 6, 2023

Miranda Wolfe
Citizen of Ohio

Dear Senators Cirino and McColley,

My name is Miranda Wolfe, and I have been a citizen of Ohio for over twenty years. I am writing to express my opposition to S.B. 117, which seeks to establish the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at the Ohio State University and the Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership at the University of Toledo. I am against this bill because it seeks to use public funds to supplement the education of law students in a way that claims to encourage collaboration and “intellectual diversity” but is at its core designed to be biased towards constitutional originalism. Allocating more resources towards teaching law under this school of thought is distinctly partisan and is aiming to sway law students—many of whom have aspirations to become the next representatives and judges in the state of Ohio—towards the interests of the conservative beliefs held by the bill’s authors. Therefore, I do not believe that it represents my best interests as a young citizen who is hoping to see herself fairly represented by her state’s elected officials and criminal justice system in the future.

As a young woman who is a member of both the Asian-American and the LGBTQ+ communities, it has been extremely heartening to me to see the level of diversity in political representation rising all over the United States in the past few election cycles. When I see someone who has a background that is more similar to mine, I feel more confident that they will be more likely to understand my unique perspective and will truly be representing my best interests throughout the lawmaking process. However, I believe that if S.B. 117 is to pass, this upward trend of more positive representation will be slowed here in Ohio; furthermore, even if someone is extremely different from me, they will be better equipped to make the best decisions for all their constituents if they have been given a well-rounded bipartisan law education.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the University of Toledo College of Law’s traditional Barrister’s Ball as a guest, and it was amazing to see how many women and people of color were taking on the tremendous task of going through law school so that some might enact positive change for citizens like myself. Unfortunately, some poor judgment on the part of some current University of Toledo law students made me feel extremely uncomfortable in the aftermath of the evening, as they decided to use the free

public photo booth to stage some photos of themselves making squinty-eyed expressions and fake-bowing to each other while wearing a conical style of hat that is traditionally associated with the rice paddies of East Asia. When I saw these photos posted online after the fact (and under the University of Toledo College of Law's name), I felt extremely disgusted looking back, and that perhaps the event had not been as welcoming towards me as I had thought.

I tell this story to show that perhaps the law school environment is not as inclusive as it may immediately seem; if people still believe that they can get away with acting as racist caricatures of East Asian people and not face any kind of backlash, the overall social norm there must not be as anti-racist and open to all as I would hope it would be. I certainly don't feel welcome to return, even after the College of Law quietly removed the photos in response to complaints, and I can imagine that there are many bright young Asian men and women interested in a law school education that would feel the same way. If more funding is allocated towards shifting the law school's environment away from bipartisanship and towards conservative constitutional originalism, this thinly veiled prejudice towards people of diverse backgrounds will only continue to become more socially accepted. I firmly believe this less than welcoming environment would discourage the kinds of people that I want to represent me in office from going to or graduating from law school, and even those who do complete it will not have been given an ideologically well-rounded education. This will result in only people with the same types of backgrounds and viewpoints being in office and will hurt marginalized communities across the board.

For these reasons, I sincerely hope that you will reconsider supporting S.B. 117, perhaps in favor of a future bill which allocates resources to the law school to truly promote the collaboration of people with a wide variety of viewpoints to suit the needs of the law students at any given time, rather than the intense focus on "tradition" and originalism that is written into the bill. I strongly feel that the well-rounded education of law students is imperative towards building a future in which the law can truly serve the interests of every citizen the way it was intended; I know that you, as senators, understand more than most how imperative that is.

Thank you for continuing to keep the best interests of all of Ohio's citizens, both present and future, in mind as you consider this matter.

Sincerely,

Miranda Wolfe