

SENATE BILL 117 IS WRONG FOR OHIO **Testimony by Campaign for Our Shared Future**

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

At the Campaign for our Shared Future (COSF), we share the General Assembly's commitment to preparing Ohio's students for success in life by teaching them to think for themselves and handle challenging topics. Unfortunately, as written, Senate Bill (SB) 117 would significantly undermine this goal and the quality of Ohio's higher education institutions.

SB 117 Injects Partisan Politics into Education

SB 117 takes the power to make key decisions for higher education institutions out of the hands of experts and puts it into the hands of politicians. SB 117 allows politicians to pick and choose members of an academic council and funds new history curriculum, research, and courses aligned with their own political agenda. Teaching Ohio students that there is only one way to understand our history is the opposite of "intellectual diversity." Instead, SB 117 puts Ohio students at a disadvantage, ensuring they are less prepared for careers and the real world. **Rather than use young people for political purposes, we must ensure they learn the true and complete history of our country, both the good and the bad.**

SB 117 is a Costly Political Stunt

At a time when higher education students in Ohio are struggling to endure the rising costs of getting an education, this proposal pours money, time, and resources into a political stunt. SB 117 allocates \$5 million dollars toward the creation of a center at Ohio State University and \$3 million for one at the University of Toledo. To put this into perspective: \$5 million dollars is enough to pay full in-state tuition costs for 400 students at Ohio State University over the same period (1). **We need to focus resources on helping students succeed, not creating more bureaucracy and wasting tax dollars.**

SB 117 is a Slippery Slope

By failing to define "intellectual diversity," SB 117 amounts to a slippery slope. The ambiguous provisions in this proposal open the floodgates to campus speakers and faculty who espouse racist, antisemitic, and other odious or violent beliefs. **Ohio is already home to an alleged "Nazi homeschooling group" (2). Committee members should focus on protecting Ohio students against the advancement of these hateful ideas; not giving them a platform in our schools.** Racist, antisemitic, and fascist ideology must be stopped, not bolstered.

SB 117 Brings Extremists to Ohio

SB 117 could drive talented professors away from Ohio, scaring away innovation, weakening academic rigor, and making the state's implicated institutions less competitive compared to those in other states. SB 117 also encourages the hiring of political extremists from outside of

Ohio and reserves only three seats on an academic council for experts from Ohio. **We should listen to real experts, as well as students and parents, about how to create the best education possible — not amplifying ideologues for the sake of politics.**

There are important questions we must consider about how higher education institutions can teach students *how* to think, not *what* to think. However, an answer to this question cannot come in the form of legislative mandates that create confusion, division, and red tape. We ask you to say NO to SB 117 and work collaboratively with students and higher education institutions to ensure all Ohio students have access to a high-quality, competitive education.

Sincerely,

Heather Harding

Executive Director of the Campaign for Our Shared Future

- (1) "Students, professors speak against Ohio bill that would create 'intellectual diversity' centers," *Ohio Capital Journey*, Jun 1, 2023, <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/06/01/students-professors-speak-out-against-ohio-bill-that-would-create-intellectual-diversity-centers/>
- (2) "Ohio education officials investigating pro-Nazi homeschooling network," *The Hill*, February 2, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/3842937-ohio-education-officials-investigating-pro-nazi-homeschooling-network/>