

Testimony of Maria Vitória de Rezende Grisi
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
June 5, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

My name is Maria Vitória de Rezende Grisi and I'm a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at The Ohio State University. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting my testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 117 (SB 117).

I'm going to make it short because I believe testimonies from Professors Christopher Nichols and Richard Fletcher are already detailed enough about the bureaucratic problems of the bill. What they both presented were extensive testimonies showing that this bill is not only going against policies at The Ohio State University but that it also didn't come from a demand from the community of such a university. I want to highlight Professor Christopher Nichols's comment that academic centers should rise from the ground, from real demands, not from an imposition from a bill. What is SB 117 trying to say? What is the message here? Also, where does it come from? With what intentions? I wonder what the next steps for these impositions are. Trying to decide what and how things should be discussed in classrooms or not? Well, never mind, that was proposed by SB 83.

It is unfortunate that I stand here again having to testify against another attempt to dictate the university's future and the topics that, for you, seem to be lacking in the Higher Education spaces. The timing of the introduction of this bill is not a coincidence. It is confirmed by the representative, and chair of this committee, Jerry Cirino in a Facebook post. Clifton J. Porter, a law student from the University of Toledo, recovered the representative's post on May 8th stating

that SB 117 walks hand-in-hand with SB 83. Besides the clear strategy to try to pass these bills during the finals period and summer, we can also see that there's a project behind these bills. The language is the same: they want to, and I quote lines 24 to 26 of SB 117, "Affirm the value of intellectual diversity in higher education and aspire to enhance the intellectual diversity of the university;" But what does that mean? What is intellectual diversity for the sponsors? Everybody has been asking this question and still goes unanswered. We can see the lack of clarity in both bills, and you are wrong if you think this is not being noticed. We demand a clarification, this bill needs to specify what is intellectual diversity, and at least show studies that prove this is missing in the University of Toledo and OSU.

Multiple times since SB 83 was introduced I've heard the word "fear". Fear that liberal biases and woke agenda, quoting Senator Cirino's op-ed in the dispatch, would take over Higher education institutions. I stand in opposition to any law based on fear. A closer look into the history of other countries and we can all see where that ends. I come from Brazil and politics based on fear led us to a dictatorship that lasted twenty-one years. I'm not saying this will be the case in this country, but it's a dangerous path that these bills open. SB 117 is another attempt to control the narrative, to make people believe intellectual diversity is not part of our academic curriculum. OSU has more than 70 centers. It is a big statement to say we lack diversity. After making people believe that there is a threat from the "woke agenda", the next step is using the democratic system to try to pass these bills.

However, we are here to say we don't need them.

I will be honest when I first read the budget for this project, on page 8, I was very upset. Besides the impossibility of implementing such a project with a proportionally small budget, as pointed out by Professor Nichols in his statement, I think it's important to look at those numbers.

I'm an international student that is not allowed to work outside of OSU, trying to make it to the end of the month with my stipend, without the possibility of making any extra money. I see colleagues have their relationships end because only the F-1 holder can work, making their partners and kids depend on their salary as Graduate Associates. Yes, I know a visa status is not something any representative here can control. However, the money is. And the money intended to be used for these centers could be instead destined to support international students, and vulnerable students, hire more professors, improve security around campus, and many other aspects of student life that are now deficient. These initiatives are what we should be discussing, these are true demands.

Therefore, I stand in opposition to this bill and I hope you consider all the testimonies against it.