

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

My name is Jessica Knouse, and I am a tenured professor at the University of Toledo College of Law. I have taught *Constitutional Law* and other courses at the College of Law for fifteen years, and I oppose the proposed Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership.

One might imagine that an institute intended to foster “intellectual diversity,” “civil discourse,” and “scholarly collaboration” (all phrases drawn from the bill’s text) would, from its inception, model a commitment to those goals. But to the contrary, most of my colleagues and I were entirely unaware of the proposal until last month, when it was announced at our final faculty meeting of the academic year. I have since learned that the proposal has been in development for four years, which makes the lack of notice to the faculty and lack of opportunity for faculty input or conversation more egregious. I and many of my colleagues find this deeply troubling. Furthermore, there appears to be no mechanism for future faculty influence; indeed, the structure seems intentionally designed to perennially evade feedback. These features belie the institute’s stated goals of “intellectual diversity,” “civil discourse,” and “scholarly collaboration.”

Additionally, it seems odd that, in a time of fiscal austerity, the state would allocate funds to a project that does nothing to meet the university’s dire and very basic needs. In general, the proposal seems unaware of our current circumstances – for example, it says the College of Law will be required to “provide adequate administrative space” for the institute, seemingly without recognition that we often struggle to schedule classes and events due to space constraints. This past fall, I taught two courses in the auditorium, in part due to the lack of sufficient classroom space. The proposal also says the institute will “enrich the curriculum in American constitutional studies,” seemingly without recognition that this is perhaps the area in which we presently have the most faculty coverage. Four faculty members regularly teach constitutional law, and others would be willing and able to if needed. Simultaneously, we’ve had to staff some other courses, in subjects our students are more likely to practice, with part-time instructors. To summarize, I have grave concerns about this institute, and I’m deeply disappointed that it might be imposed without any faculty deliberation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Knouse