

To the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

I submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 117 as a concerned student. I am a third-year law student at the University of Toledo College of Law (Toledo Law) and a lifelong Ohioan. I have spent my last three years being highly involved in student government and student organizations at the law school. I am the Vice President of Toledo Law's Student Bar Association, Treasurer of OUTLaw, our LGBTQIA+ student organization, and former President of the Night Student Association. In my various roles, I have worked with my fellow student-leaders to improve the student experience at the law school. The success of Toledo Law and its students is of great importance to me, which is why I strongly oppose SB 117.

In recent years, Toledo Law has faced numerous challenges. Funding has declined and hiring freezes at the university have made it challenging to fill vacant roles within the College of Law, both faculty and staff. The Office of Professional Development has had a vacancy for almost a year, which has significantly impacted the externship and job search of many of our students. Professors and deans have been seeking opportunities elsewhere, leaving Toledo Law with a scarcity of courses, which limits students' ability to explore various areas of law during their legal education. Additionally, Toledo Bar passage rates have declined and its ranking in US News and World Report has plummeted. The absence of necessary faculty and staff causes great worry to students who can barely fill their class schedule to obtain the credits needed to graduate. The financial strain at Toledo Law is very much felt by the students themselves and the declining reputation of Toledo Law will significantly impact the number of applications Toledo Law will receive from prospective students.

Establishing the “Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership” at the University of Toledo College of Law is an entirely unnecessary measure. Toledo Law already has four Constitutional law scholars on its faculty who foster civil discourse and offer “intellectual diversity” on matters relating to Constitutional law. Toledo law regularly hosts a variety of speakers to discuss newly decided Supreme Court decisions and debate general Constitutional law ideologies. The establishment of a specialized institute for Constitutional law that is independent from the university does nothing to address the actual concerns Toledo Law students and faculty face. I strongly urge you to prioritize the allocation of our resources towards programs and initiatives that improve the lives of Ohioans, rather than on an unnecessary and unhelpful “independent academic unit” that seeks to circumvent University of Toledo protocol. There is no denying that law school on its own is a rigorous intellectual journey; no separate institute is needed to ensure that.

Students at Toledo Law are already encouraged to participate in “free” and “open” discussions, as the bill seeks to address. We learn the law both in its current form and historical, and, more often than not, the answer to any legal question is “it depends”. Already, Toledo law students are taught to look at different sides of an issue. There is nothing this “Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership” offers Toledo that it does not already have. The funding for said institute does not aid Toledo Law. The proposed bill offers a great sum of money; however, it will be used solely for staffing the institute, NOT the College of Law, and only focuses on one area of law. These funds are not available to address the areas where we face significant shortages in specialized professors, such as family law, criminal law, and estate law. These are crucial for future legal professionals, as they are the areas of law that are commonly used to serve our

communities. Toledo Law is in no short supply of diverse opinions or Constitutional law professors (as previously mentioned - there are four).

In conclusion, I request the Ohio Senate recognize the urgent needs of the University of Toledo College of Law and hope you see that this bill does not address them and does nothing to improve the quality of education. This bill seeks to answer a problem that does not exist at Toledo Law, and it fails to provide funding to address its most pressing concerns. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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J.D. Candidate, December 2023
University of Toledo College of Law