

Senate Committee on Workforce Development and Higher Education

June 7, 2023

Ohio Senate Bill 117

Establish certain entities at Ohio State and University of Toledo

Testimony by Jeanne Ogden

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, good morning.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 117.

My name is Jeanne Ogden. I am a lifelong resident of Ohio, married, and mother of three daughters. I have a Civil Engineering Degree from Ohio State University.

I am opposed to the entirety of this bill, but will speak mostly to the proposal for OSU.

Representative Cirino believes our higher education system has been overrun by liberal indoctrination that oppresses all who disagree. He believes the Chicago Principles bolster his argument that Ohio must implement state-controlled, state mandated “diversity of thought” in our universities. The Chicago Principles, penned in 2014 and following a long tradition of free speech traditions at Chicago University, do indeed espouse an educational atmosphere that explores a range of views without penalty. They take into consideration everything from campus speakers being disinvited to the Red Scare and the State of Illinois’ faculty and student communist witch hunt during the Red Scare. They are an attempt to foster diversity of thought in the service of learning. It’s a noble effort.

They do not mention anything about state control.

Government control is the antithesis of the Chicago Principles.

On February 27, 2023, the University of Chicago announced the executive director of its new Chicago Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression, will be Tom Ginsburg, who recently roundly criticized Governor DeSantis’ takeover of the New College of Florida by appointing 6 conservative members to its board.¹

In Ohio, many universities already pledged to follow the Chicago Principles: Ohio State University, Ashland, Ohio Wesleyan, Ohio University, Cleveland State, Miami, Toledo, Akron, Bowling Green, Youngstown, Shawnee State, and the University of Cincinnati. They recognize they need to make room for diversity of views.

They did not sign on for government control.

Ohio Senate Bill 40, offering some free speech protections was signed into law by DeWine on March 24, 2021. This law has hardly had time to have an impact.

And yet, in Sponsor Cirino's testimony, he decries that "it is no secret that university faculty are predominantly liberal. This causes a single ideological perspective to dominate academia. With the passage of this legislation, we are giving students and their parents' options within the market to choose an education that is best suited for them." While in the bill itself is meant to "educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth."

Which is it?

Do parents choose the truth their progeny will learn from their professors?

Do students seek their own truth without influence from their college professors?

Is there one truth?

Whose truth is it?

The State's?

If balance in scholarly thought and exploration by all faculty, staff, and students, were the pure-hearted intent of this bill then it would not require the new institute's 7-member council be hand-selected and approved by our deeply conservative Ohio Senate. They would have appointed a bipartisan board to consider applicants.

If balance of comfort in participation and self-expression by all faculty, staff, and students, were the true intent of sponsors and supporters of this bill, they would support existing Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion programs within our universities. They would not destroy one program to build up the other.

I understand it must be distressing to see less college graduates and faculty espousing conservative views. In testimony for HB 103, one of the sponsors was convinced if he could educate more students on conservative principles, if we, the taxpayers, could fund and mandate his curriculum be taught, then surely conservative values would win the day, which I believe is the true purpose of this bill.

One of your witnesses stated that the “battle for the soul of our nation will be won or lost in our classrooms.”

This bill is about control. This bill is about existential fear that without artificial protection, the next generation may see things differently. The party in power may not be in power a decade from now. Their attempt to exert government control over whether that happens is the clear mark of a democracy backsliding.

We must help them resist the temptation to interfere.

We see democracies backsliding around the world, and where they are backsliding, we see governments snatching control of their education systems. This is happening in Ireland, Turkey, and Poland to name a few. Some of you want to be Florida.

We are not Florida. We are Ohio. In Ohio, we wholeheartedly reject the idea of government control of education on principle. Please vote no on SB 117.

<https://www.thefire.org/faculty>

<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/attacks-on-academic-freedom-in-us-desantis-roth-hamline-by-tom-ginsburg-2023-01>

<https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/tom-ginsburg-appointed-faculty-director-universitys-forum-free-inquiry-and-expression>