

Testimony of Vinicius Cervilieri
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 Vinicius Cervilieri, a Masters student in the Department of Horticulture and Crop Science at The Ohio State University, graduating this summer term. I must state that I do not represent The Ohio State University. Instead, I am submitting my testimony as an individual citizen rather than in any official capacity in opposition to Senate Bill 117 (SB 117).

Professors Christopher Nichols and Richard Fletcher provided extensive testimonies demonstrating that this bill contradicts the policies of The Ohio State University and does not originate from the university community's demands. It is worth emphasizing Professor Christopher Nichols's viewpoint that academic centers should emerge organically from genuine needs rather than being imposed by a bill. We should examine what SB 117 is attempting to convey and its underlying intentions. Moreover, it is important to consider the source and purpose of this bill. What are the next steps for such impositions? Are they aiming to dictate the topics and discussions within classrooms? Interestingly, that particular proposal was put forth by SB 83, but let's not dwell on that for now.

It is regrettable that I find myself testifying against yet another attempt to control the future of our university and dictate which topics are deemed lacking in higher education spaces, according to your perspective. The timing of this bill's introduction is not coincidental, as confirmed by Representative Jerry Cirino, who chairs this committee, in a Facebook post. On May 8th, Clifton J. Porter, a law student from the University of Toledo, shared the representative's post, stating that SB 117 aligns closely with SB 83. It is evident that there is a deliberate strategy to pass these bills during finals and summer, suggesting a larger agenda behind them. Both bills employ similar language, such as the desire to "Affirm the value of intellectual diversity in higher education and aspire to enhance the intellectual diversity of the university," as stated in lines 24 to 26 of SB 117. However, what exactly does this mean? What do the sponsors intend by intellectual diversity? These questions have been raised repeatedly but remain unanswered. The lack of clarity in both bills is apparent, and it is erroneous to assume that this is going unnoticed. We demand clarification; this bill must explicitly define what constitutes intellectual diversity and provide evidence to support the claim that it is lacking at the University of Toledo and OSU.

Since the introduction of SB 83, the term "fear" has been repeatedly mentioned in relation to concerns about liberal biases and a so-called "woke agenda" taking over higher education institutions, as stated in Senator Cirino's op-ed in The Dispatch. I firmly oppose any legislation based on fear. By examining the history of other countries, it becomes evident where such an approach leads. Coming from Brazil, I have witnessed how politics driven by fear resulted in a twenty-one-year dictatorship. I am not suggesting that the same fate awaits this country, but it is a perilous path that these bills are paving. SB 117 represents yet another endeavor to control the narrative, creating a false notion that intellectual diversity is absent from our academic curriculum. Considering that OSU alone has over 70 centers, it is a significant assertion to claim a lack of diversity. After instilling

the belief that there is a threat from the so-called "woke agenda," the next step is exploiting the democratic system to push for the passage of these bills. But we don't need them.

When I initially reviewed the budget for this project, specifically on page 8, I was deeply dismayed, and I want to be honest about my reaction. Not only does the allocated budget seem inadequate to implement such a project, as emphasized by Professor Nichols in his statement, but it is crucial to closely examine these figures.

As an international student, I am prohibited from seeking employment outside of OSU. I struggle to make ends meet each month with my stipend, without any opportunity to earn additional income. I witness my colleagues experiencing relationship strains because only the F-1 visa holder is permitted to work, leaving their partners and children dependent solely on the graduate associate's salary. I understand that visa status is beyond the control of any representative here. However, the allocation of funds is not. The money intended for these centers could be better utilized to support international and vulnerable students, hire more professors, enhance campus security, and address various deficiencies in student life. These are the initiatives that merit our attention and discussion as they reflect genuine needs.

I firmly oppose this bill, and I implore you to carefully consider all the testimonies presented against it.