

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

I am writing once more under what feels like a shrewdly calculated deadline to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill No. 117, which seeks to establish the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at the Ohio State University, and the Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership at the University of Toledo. There are significant concerns that need to be addressed at the University of Toledo College of Law, but none of them are addressed here—for this reason, this bill surviving committee is a disservice to our public higher educational institutions.

First and foremost, after watching the thoughtful and succinct testimony from last week, it has become clear that there are concerns about the potential bias and lack of intellectual diversity that may arise from establishing these centers. The bill emphasizes the promotion of specific ideas, traditions, and texts that have shaped the American constitutional order and society. While it is essential to study and understand our history, it is equally important to foster an inclusive academic environment that encourages the exploration and discussion of diverse perspectives. The bill's emphasis on "intellectual diversity" does not guarantee the inclusion of a wide range of viewpoints, potentially limiting academic freedom and stifling the exchange of ideas.

By establishing centers that focus exclusively on one ideology or set of ideas, there is a risk of creating an echo chamber rather than fostering a robust intellectual environment. It isn't a secret amongst law students or the legal community that this bill reads as a subtle endorsement of textualist or originalist thought. These beliefs tend to skew conservatively, and in previous testimony I have adequately expressed the strong presence groups like the Federalist Society have on campus. This is not a group of individuals struggling to make their voices heard. This is a well-funded, well-oiled machine that has offered far more events than other organizations struggling to get enough money for two pizza parties a year. I have attended their events, and truly believe that debate is alive and well at our school. I take particular issue with the insinuation made in this bill that students are lacking in their ability to make polite conversation about important topics. Many of my peers have used the skills gained from our education thus far to ensure our voices are heard on this one, only to be faced with disappointing questions from this committee that try to reduce it to something as simple as picking a side based on who you vote for.

I have seen fantastic examples of professional advocacy on controversial topics at my school. Members of the Latino Law Student Association, Black Law Student Association, Women's Law Student Association, and OUTlaw (our LGBTQ+ organization) have forced an unwilling administration to have tough conversations about the ways in which they believe our school can

better work to serve us. These peers have also shared heartbreaking and infuriating stories of being faced with racism and other unacceptable forms of discrimination, only to be told that there will be no debate on the issue because practices that exclude them are promoted by students or faculty that administration is concerned about having frank conversations with. It is not a lack of debate that our school should be worried about—it is simply the strategic decision to silence voices that create a varied student body in order to uplift another perspective.

I do not hear concerns from proponents of this bill about other types of diversity. I do not hear proponents of this bill argue that in addition to focusing on our already strong constitutional law programming we should look into the dwindling amount of diverse students applying to this university. I do not hear proponents of this bill express concern that our faculty is almost entirely white. I do not even hear this committee, which is composed almost entirely of straight white cisgender men, consider that they aren't getting testimony from more diverse students because the University of Toledo College of Law is already so hostile to students who want to express different viewpoints that my peers encourage their mentees to stay away. Creating an institute that focuses on ideals that have been weaponized against non-white, disabled, or non-straight/cis students at this school may very well make the law center look like an exclusionary haven for only one way of thinking instead of the welcoming institution of higher education current students are desperately fighting for it to be. This will be achieved through this bill's focus on intellectual diversity.

In recent years, the concept of "diversity of thought" has gained significant attention as a desirable goal in various social and professional spheres. Advocates argue that embracing diverse perspectives can enhance decision-making processes and foster innovation. However, upon closer examination, the notion of diversity of thought reveals itself as a hollow concept, steeped in hypocrisy and riddled with inherent contradictions. Proponents of diversity of thought often tout its potential to create inclusive environments. However, the reality is far from this idealistic portrayal. In practice, the term "diversity of thought" is often used as a smokescreen to suppress dissenting opinions. Individuals who hold viewpoints that deviate from prevailing ideologies are often marginalized or silenced in the name of promoting diversity. This hypocrisy exposes the true nature of diversity of thought as an exclusionary tool rather than an inclusive one.

Advocates argue that diversity of thought brings together individuals with different perspectives, which can lead to robust discussions and better decision-making. However, this argument fails to consider the inherent biases that underlie human nature. Instead of fostering open dialogue, diversity of thought tends to reinforce confirmation bias. People are naturally inclined to seek out information that aligns with their existing beliefs, and when confronted with differing viewpoints, they often dismiss or reject them outright. Thus, diversity of thought may merely serve as an echo chamber, further entrenching existing biases rather than challenging them.

Ironically, the concept of diversity of thought is often selectively applied to certain areas while disregarded in others. In academia, for example, calls for diversity often focus on political and ideological diversity, but fail to address the lack of racial or gender diversity within faculties. Dissenting voices that challenge prevailing paradigms are frequently dismissed or excluded, resulting in a skewed intellectual landscape. This cherry-picking approach to diversity not only undermines the credibility of the concept but also perpetuates ideological conformity instead of genuine intellectual inquiry. One of the most troubling aspects of the diversity of thought discourse is the emergence of censorship under the guise of promoting inclusivity. In various institutions, dissenting opinions are often labeled as offensive, triggering, or harmful, leading to their suppression. This censorship stifles intellectual growth and critical thinking, undermining the very foundations of a free and open society. Rather than encouraging diverse perspectives, this approach engenders an environment of fear and self-censorship, hindering true intellectual exploration.

By centering an entire institution around a specific ideology, we risk stifling the intellectual diversity that is alive and well at the UT Law Center and that is essential for a well-rounded education. This may inadvertently limit students' exposure to different perspectives, hindering their ability to develop critical thinking skills and stifling intellectual exploration. While it is certainly a value many advocates hold dear to promote certain values and principles, it should not come at the expense of a comprehensive and inclusive education that prepares students for the complexities of the real world.

Furthermore, the bill proposes an appropriation of funds to support these centers. In a time when educational institutions face various financial challenges, it is crucial to prioritize funding for core academic programs that directly benefit students' education and well-being. Allocating substantial resources to establish and maintain these centers may divert funds from more pressing needs, such as improving classroom resources, reducing tuition costs, and supporting student scholarships. It is essential to carefully consider the allocation of taxpayer dollars to ensure they are used most effectively and efficiently.

Moreover, the bill does not adequately address the potential duplication of efforts between existing academic departments and these proposed centers. Ohio State University and the University of Toledo already have departments and programs that cover the subject matter of these centers, such as political science, law, and constitutional studies. Creating separate academic units may lead to unnecessary redundancies, increased administrative burdens, and fragmented educational opportunities for students. It would be more prudent to strengthen and enhance existing departments by providing additional resources and support.

The bill's language regarding the appointment and tenure of faculty within these centers also raises concerns about intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas. While faculty

appointed to the centers may hold joint appointments, the emphasis on housing tenure-track faculty within these centers could create an environment where dissenting viewpoints or perspectives outside the prescribed ideologies of the centers face marginalization or exclusion. A vibrant academic community thrives on intellectual diversity, fostering rigorous debate, and challenging prevailing narratives. It is essential that our universities remain spaces where scholars with diverse perspectives can contribute to the growth of knowledge and the development of well-rounded students.

Lastly, I am concerned about the lack of a comprehensive evaluation plan or metrics for assessing the success and impact of these centers. It is essential to establish clear goals and objectives, as well as mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives. Without a robust evaluation framework, it will be challenging to determine whether these centers are fulfilling their intended purposes and providing value to the students and broader community.

In conclusion, while I appreciate the desire to promote civic education and constitutional understanding, I believe Senate Bill No. 117 raises valid concerns regarding intellectual diversity, efficient resource allocation, potential duplication, and accountability. I respectfully urge you to reconsider the passage of this bill in its current form and explore alternative approaches that prioritize inclusivity, cost-effectiveness, and the enhancement of existing academic programs.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that you will carefully consider the concerns I have raised and make a decision that best serves the interests of Ohio's educational institutions and the students they serve.

Sincerely,

Renee Hopper