

# **Testimony SB 40**

**May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

## **Committee on Higher Education Ohio House of Representatives**

Chair Keller, Vice-Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity for myself and others to provide testimony this morning.

My name is Taylor Armstrong and I have the great privilege of serving as the Vice-Chairman of the Ohio College Republican Federation, which represents 29 chartered College Republican Chapters within public and private higher institutions across our great State. Today, I am glad to join some of my colleagues from the Young Americans for Liberty to ask all you to support Senate Bill 40, the Forming Open and Robust University Minds Act.

There is no doubt among most of us that certain aspects of our political discourse have become polarized and divisive at times. Despite differences, both sides of the aisle can agree that freedom of speech, as guarded by the First Amendment of the Constitution, is necessary for our society to learn and adapt. Our State colleges and universities here in Ohio play a crucial role in that concept being places where ideas and viewpoints are discussed and challenged. This idea comes with a certain level of risk that some higher education institutions see as encumbrances and look to minimize them through ‘free-speech spaces’, security or event costs, and even refusing guest-speakers.

Recently I learned of a situation concerning Wilmington College where the Student Body President was discouraged by a faculty advisor to express his conservative perspective on certain issues. Even though this occurred at a private institution, it could very well happen at the public-level. As well-intentioned as these actions might be, all it does is inhibit dialogue and impede discourse. Our state higher education institutions are well-resourced and prepared to handle any concerns, situations, or necessary risks that come with having free speech. In other words, this bill and the First Amendment should not be seen as burdens on our taxpayer-funded colleges and universities in Ohio.

As mainstream or fringe, conservative or liberal that some ideas and viewpoints may be, they have a right to be heard under proper and respectful means. Senate Bill 40 promotes this belief and makes Ohio an nation-wide example for promoting free speech on our college campuses.

**Taylor J. Armstrong  
Vice-Chairman  
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