

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and honored members of the House Higher Education Committee,

I want to thank you all for the opportunity to speak on behalf of this bill and provide not only my testimony but the stories of others who are not here today. I am Sasha Antonyuk, a second-year, Economics, Political Science, and Pre-Law student at Capital University

When I first heard of this bill a week ago and was asked to testify, I was astonished and excited that a bill regarding viewpoint discrimination and the stifling of intellectual diversity existed. This is a major issue in Universities across America and my campus is certainly a reflection of it. Although my University is primarily a liberal and progressive school, there are times where this progressive environment can be hostile towards those who share challenging beliefs. First coming to University as a freshman, I was already aware of the liberal and progressive environment. However, it wasn't a long time after attending my classes that not only is this campus majorly liberal, but my beliefs are not welcome by many. I remember sitting in my American Government class having a class discussion over the Texas Abortion Bill and a classmate was raising her voice about how all this is "white men making law on our bodies" and so on. I did want to share my opinion on the subject, but after other classmates and the professors agreed and clapped following her pro-choice statement, I realized that my opinion was not welcome.

Still, even after experiences like these, I hoped to have open discussions with inside and outside the classroom on campus on challenging topics. However, I soon realized that the one-sided and close-minded environment fostered by my university would make that impossible. This realization came in the middle of a classroom discussion in which abortion was indirectly mentioned. Sensing that some students may not agree on the topic, one student suggested that "We probably shouldn't have debates on abortion because I am going to slap some people here." Unfortunately, many of my peers agreed with her, which just goes to show how much of an echo chamber our universities are. While students have the right to express themselves however they wish, the greater issue is the culture fostered by the administration and faculty, which consistently challenges minority viewpoints and applauds perspectives that mirror their own. I saw this pattern play out during my years in college, here are a few examples of many more that I witnessed:

1. A professor who was tearing down event flyers for a conservative organization Tour and justifying it by saying “no one would be interested anyway”.
2. Another instance was when the regional representative of a conservative organization held a tabling event at the org fair and were told by staff to take it down because it was “offensive to others”. While other political organizations on extreme spectrums on the left were simply called “a matter of opinion”
3. Friends who are students of other departments such as Sociology who had professors who would reduce their grades on assignments based on their beliefs
4. A professor created a left leaning curriculum to which some authors of the books we were reading were outright insulting and dehumanizing first responders. A student mentioned the disrespect because his father lost his life as a firefighter. Professor disregarded it and disagreed with the student’s concerns.
5. I have good relationships with my political science professors and some of my classmates as well. But, it is a little hard to sit through while they talk crap about other students who share rather conservative beliefs and how stupid they are
6. I have a close friend who is transferring Universities because his differing political and religious views made him an outcast to his department
7. Members from other Universities who lead conservative political organizations are constantly denied funding by the University and have to rely on other ways to get money to finance their events while other organizations are given more than enough funding from Universities
8. Posters from conservative political organizations are taken down by students and faculty.

These instances that I have experienced and witnessed were occurrences that I swept under the rug understanding that this is the culture of Universities and I just had to deal with it. However, I am glad that I can recall everything to testify here today.

I consider myself to be lucky to also have made good relationships with others despite differing political and religious beliefs. One of my main interests on campus is to reduce the political polarization on campus and have open discussions that many are not willing to have, and through this, I was able to develop good relationships with people on different sides of the political spectrums. It gave me some hope that we are able to have discussions and respect each other but it is also

the sad reality that this is the way it should be, and it is not. I am excited that the HB151 was introduced and it will make a difference for higher education and help transform it into what it should be.

Thank you and I urge you to vote yes on House Bill 151.