

Testimony of Erynn Beaton, Ph.D., M.B.A.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 17, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Erynn Beaton. I am an associate professor in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

While there are many problems with the proposed bill, I will focus on one major, overarching issue – its logical inconsistencies. Effective policy is internally consistent, and logically inconsistent bills are likely to both be ineffective and to have unintended consequences.¹ HB 151 is fraught with inconsistencies. It purportedly pursues the worthy objectives of open intellectual inquiry (line 727) and freedom of speech (lines 732-4), but many provisions actively suppress those values. Here are but three examples:

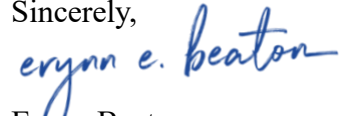
- Lines 2515-69 prohibit public employees from striking. Is the right to strike not one of the most important forms of free speech and expression in our country?
- Lines 815-20 & 826-29 ban diversity statements. How can we hire faculty that represent intellectual diversity if we can't ask them to tell us about how they will contribute to it?
- Lines 848-52 require that “prior to an initial offering” of a DEI course, it must be approved for exemption. Don't the writers mean prior to a course being required? The sub bill is written such that any DEI course will be reviewed. Related, glaringly missing from the bill is any definition of a DEI course. This is cause for confusion. For instance, most management courses discuss DEI given its importance to employers.² Is “Organizational Behavior,” a core business/management course, considered a DEI course? Nearly every text on the matter has 1-2 dedicated chapters.³ Should this course, core to the field, not be required of all management students?

The way I see it, this bill would not improve intellectual diversity, it will quash it. Here's what I foresee happening following its passage: Students, upset by the censorship of their training and limitation of job opportunity, will make a barrage of complaints against tenured conservative faculty who advocate conservative ideologies in their courses. (I have personal knowledge of students already making such complaints.) Students – especially racial and ethnic minorities, women, and those with secular beliefs – will give all faculty, but especially conservative faculty, extremely low ratings on the bill's bias evaluation question. Based on these complaints and low ratings, these conservative faculty members, under the provisions of this bill must be sanctioned, can be taken up for post-tenure review, censured, given remedial training, and some may even be terminated for cause after all of these hurdles fail to change student ratings. We'll ultimately have less ideological diversity, the opposite of what this bill is so covertly trying to do.

Meanwhile, scholars at the top of their field will not want to work in a state with policies that restrict their teaching, students will not want to attend Ohio universities because it diminishes their job opportunities, and by virtue of both these outcomes Ohio academic programs will languish in the national rankings,⁴ which will feed the cycle.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this poorly written and harmful bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "erynn e. beaton". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Erynn Beaton

¹ See these highly cited papers: [“Systematically Pinching Ideas: A Comparative Approach to Policy Design”](#) and [“Design Principles for Policy Mixes: Cohesion and Coherence in ‘New Governance Arrangements’”](#)

² The [top private employers](#) in Ohio know the importance of DEI, see what they have to say on the topic: [Cleveland Clinic](#), [Walmart](#), [Amazon](#), [Kroger](#), [OSU Wexner Medical Center](#), [University Hospitals Health System](#), [Bon Secours Mercy Health](#), [Ohio Health](#), [JP Morgan Chase](#).

³ [This is text used at OSU](#) (chapters 3 and 4 cover diversity), and [here’s another popular text](#) (chapter 2 covers diversity).

⁴ In my field of public affairs OSU [outranks](#) any institution in Florida (a state in which similar bills have been passed within). Our rankings are reputational, which means they are determined by peer assessment.