

Testimony of Mary E. Triage, Ph.D.
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Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair

May 15, 2023

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

My name is Mary Triage. I am a professor in the School of Communication at The University of Akron where I have taught for 25 years. I do not represent The University of Akron, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

I have read Substitute HB 151 in its entirety. I firmly believe the bill will have a negative impact on the quality of education on Ohio's college campuses.

First, by constraining the ability of professors to introduce and engage discussion around what the bill calls "controversial matters," we are limiting our students' abilities to practice critical thinking and speaking skills that are needed in the workplace. It is precisely through engaging in these discussions that we foster critical dialogue on pressing issues facing us as citizens of Ohio and the U.S. In all of my classes, I am dedicated to fostering an open classroom environment in which all perspectives are welcomed.

Second, Section 3345.87, part (C) in particular, will have a harmful effect on our students and represents broad overreach on the part of the state. The way this section of the bill reads makes me wonder if you have ever read publications put out not only scholars in the areas of race/sex but also corporations who have conducted their own research on the benefits of diversity and of recognizing the existence of, and working to combat racism and sexism. Part (C) states that "No state institution of higher education shall provide or require training... that advocates or promotes any of the following concepts," including, (2). "An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously." For clarity, I recommend listening to or interviewing teachers and administrators, or reading our scholarship on racism and sexism. In my 25 years of teaching and publishing in the areas of social justice, I have never come across any theory/philosophical framework/concept that says persons are "inherently" racist/sexist. Racism and sexism are learned behaviors. Additionally, entire bodies of scholarship have explored how people may (not necessarily, but *may*) exhibit racist/sexist beliefs and behaviors without realizing it, i.e., unconsciously. To state otherwise is to deny a wealth of scholarship that has shed light on not

only the problems of racism and sexism, but *on the ways to address it and eradicate*. I'm sure this is a goal we all share—to make the state of Ohio a more welcoming and productive place to live.

Section 3345.87 (B) states that “With respect to every position, policy, program, and activity, each states institution of higher education shall...” (2) “Provide no advantage or disadvantage to faculty, staff, or students on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in admissions, hiring, promotion, tenuring, or workplace conditions.” This section may be interpreted in such a way as to result in the dismantling of a myriad of majors, minors, and certificate programs rooted in social identities that profoundly shape human life, such as Women’s Studies, Pride in STEM (LGBTQ STEM students), and the Black Student Association. Our students’ academic success often hinges on their positive experiences in these programs.

Although your intentions may be well-positioned, I firmly believe this bill will harm our students, leaving them ill-equipped to participate in the workforce and in their communities. As such, it is also bad for the state’s economy.

Kind regards,

Mary E. Triece, Ph.D.