

May 16, 2023

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

Please accept this written testimony on the matter of HB 151. I am an Associate Professor of Media and Communications at Miami University and I strongly oppose HB 151 and its companion bill in the Ohio Senate. I do not represent Miami, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

Higher education in Ohio has many problems that the legislature could help address. Enrollment is declining statewide. Ohio universities and community colleges have both seen a 12% decrease in enrollment from Fall 2022 to Fall 2012, according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education. Meanwhile, tuition has been steadily increasing as students struggle with debt and other financial issues. State funding support is nowhere near past levels. The disruptions caused by COVID are still rippling throughout higher education as students struggle with college preparedness, mental health, and other issues. There are substantial challenges ahead.

Unfortunately, HB 151 does nothing to address these pressing issues. Instead, these bills focus on culture war topics that have little to do with teaching and learning. These bills will politicize higher education and drive away prospective students and teachers. They do not reflect the reality of what actually occurs on college campuses.

Senate Bill 83 prohibits labor actions by faculty. This has little to do with teaching and learning, but will surely impede Ohio educational institutions from attracting and retaining talented faculty. If you believe in free markets, then how can you remove the rights of workers to take collective action to improve their working conditions?

These bills undermine the tradition of free speech in America by proposing a McCarthyite regime of reporting and thought-policing. Such measures are completely unwarranted and create a hostile environment for intellectual freedom and the productive exchange of ideas. Students cannot simply be shielded from topics and worldviews that some find uncomfortable.

HB 151 and its companion bill in the Ohio Senate would send a clear signal that Ohio lawmakers do not support universities. If these laws are passed, students will go elsewhere. Faculty will leave. Our great universities will fall further into decline.

I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote NO on these shortsighted bills.

Matthew Crain