

Opponent Testimony of Sylvia Snow-Rackley
House Bill 151
House Higher Education Committee
May 17th, 2023

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

My Name is Sylvia Snow-Rackley, I have been an Ohio resident my entire life, I am a member of the Ohio Student's Association and currently a student at Cuyahoga Community College on the Urban Studies track. I plan to continue my education in a 4-year-institution and ideally would like to stay in Ohio. I bring this up because if this bill passed, I don't know if I would.

It is my opinion that this bill would have the opposite effect of what it says it intended to do and that it may actually serve to DECREASE the degree of "intellectual diversity" and free speech occurring within schools. I find myself particularly concerned about the terminology surrounding the concept of "Controversial Beliefs or Policies".

This semester I took a class on traditional Western Christianity, and one thing we talked about was heliocentrism: the idea that the Earth orbits around the sun, a commonly accepted fact today. In the 1600s however, heliocentrism was a controversial idea. Galileo was prosecuted and became renowned among many people for being a heretic, a prohibition was passed against the idea in 1616. And yet years later this model has propelled unparalleled scientific progress in our understanding of the world. I bring this up to question the concept that a controversial idea doesn't have a right or wrong, that it should always be taught as non-partisan. This model pushed our world into the scientific revolution, Galileo and Nicolaus Copernicus (the man who originally is credited with teaching heliocentrism) were both teachers, University teachers, and without their fervent pushing of this model today if they had limited their opinions in their teachings for fear of being labeled as heretics or brainwashers, we would not have much of the technology we see today. As you may already see where I am going with this parallel, I think this bill has the potential to limit and slow these kinds of academic revolutions and movements in the future.

As I mentioned earlier, I am on the Urban Studies track. The history of our cities is riddled with controversy, they are rich in social, historical, and cultural changes, conflicts, and more, and the conversations we have in class about them are equally rich, I don't want these experiences to be limited because my teachers may be afraid for their jobs, even in the cases of historical fact.

Controversial Beliefs and ideas and the conversations that surround those are some of the most important factors in moving our society forward. It is my opinion that the vague wording and even some of the ideas directly quoted in the definition of controversial beliefs like climate change will discourage teachers from expressing their true ideas and pushing the world forward as they may be afraid of seeming as though they are

“inoculating” the students, even if they are not. Colleges are incredibly impactful on their surrounding cities and even nations, the things taught in higher ed facilities will spread out and impact our entire community. I am concerned that the possible limiting of these conversations is limiting our collective growth of knowledge as a society.

Ohio colleges are some of the best in the nation, the best in the world. We want to produce leaders and changemakers in Ohio, but to do that we have to equip them with the tools to be able to do so. If this bill passes it is my belief that we will be failing our Ohio students, and pushing them to go elsewhere as a result. Though this bill is meant to combat intellectual diversity, its addressing of everything from controversial ideas to eliminating striking seem antithetical to that. It is for these reasons I urge you to Vote no on this bill in order to allow Ohio schools to continue to thrive.

Thank you.