

November 29, 2023

The Honorable Tom Young
77 South High Street
Floor 11
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chair Young and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jenna Robinson, president of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal. I am writing to express my support for Ohio Senate Bill 83, a much-needed piece of legislation aimed at instituting critical reforms in state institutions of higher education.

For too long, colleges and universities in Ohio and around the country have forgotten at least part of the public purpose for which they exist. They have substituted the private interests and incentives of university professors and administrators for the needs and demands of Ohio students and citizens. Colleges and universities must return to their original mission of seeking the truth and preparing students for civic life. This bill enshrines the practices that are necessary for truth-seeking; viewpoint diversity, free inquiry, and academic transparency will ensure that Ohio's educational institutions remain beacons of knowledge and open inquiry.

Senate Bill 83 plays a pivotal role in helping state institutions fulfill their public purpose by strengthening the foundations of higher education. The legislation recognizes that universities are not only centers of learning but also key contributors to the intellectual and cultural advancement of society.

As social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has observed, universities cannot serve two masters. They must have only one purpose: truth-seeking or social justice. At a public institution, the purpose must be truth. This bill ensures that universities commit to the purpose of truth-seeking and take the necessary steps for implementation and enforcement.

Senate Bill 83 recognizes that viewpoint diversity is essential to universities' truth-seeking purpose. Academic freedom, open inquiry, honest debate, and the search for truth rely on diverse viewpoints being welcomed and protected on campus. By including viewpoint diversity as an essential part of institutional governance, this bill aligns university incentives with the mission to pursue truth. This commitment serves as a cornerstone for fostering a robust and dynamic academic environment where students are exposed to a wide range of ideas and viewpoints.

Moreover, by affirming institutional neutrality, this bill will dispel pressure on students, faculty, or administrators to conform to specific ideologies. And by instituting disciplinary sanctions for those who interfere with intellectual diversity rights, Senate Bill 83 establishes a clear framework for accountability, ensuring that the core tenets of academic freedom are safeguarded.

The bill's emphasis on transparency in speaker fees, prohibitions on certain foreign partnerships, and reporting requirements further enhances accountability, ensuring that the public is well-informed about the activities of state institutions. By requiring state institutions to submit annual reports on violations of intellectual diversity rights and resulting disciplinary sanctions, the legislation promotes transparency and demonstrates a commitment to accountability.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 83's mandated five-year summary of institutional costs will provide the General Assembly with valuable insights for evaluating university funding needs. This ensures that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively, aligning with the public interest and the university's public purpose.

The bill's provisions regarding faculty evaluations, peer evaluations, and post-tenure reviews contribute to the continuous improvement of academic standards and faculty performance. The focus on faculty workload policies and the development of a mandatory American government or history course underscores a commitment to educational quality and a well-rounded curriculum. These provisions ensure that Ohio's public institutions provide value for the students and citizens of Ohio.

Also essential to academic freedom are Senate Bill 83's prohibitions on state institutions from accepting gifts, donations, or contributions from the People's Republic of China or any organization suspected of acting on its behalf. This provision aligns with public and national security interests, safeguarding intellectual property and ensuring the security of Ohio.

Moreover, the bill's framework for approving academic partnerships with institutions in China incorporates important safeguards to protect intellectual property and national security. This measured approach showcases a commitment to fostering international collaborations while maintaining the integrity of our educational institutions.

The bill's requirement for the Auditor of State to audit state institutions' structural safeguards during normal audits adds an additional layer of accountability. This ensures that the measures in place to protect intellectual property and national security are regularly assessed and adjusted as needed.

Additionally, the provision mandating annual reports on state institution compliance with syllabus posting requirements and the prohibition of certain policies designed to segregate based on characteristics ensure transparency and accountability in the day-to-day operations of educational institutions.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 83 is a comprehensive and necessary piece of legislation that addresses the critical challenges faced by state institutions of higher education in Ohio and across the country. By emphasizing intellectual diversity, preserving academic freedom, supporting universities in fulfilling their public purpose, and ensuring accountability through audits and reporting, the bill paves the way for a higher education system that not only excels academically but also serves the broader interests of our society.

As a dedicated advocate for excellence in higher education, I recognize the transformative potential of Senate Bill 83. I urge you to support this legislation, reinforcing our collective commitment to excellence, diversity of thought, and pursuit of truth in higher education. I appreciate your leadership and commitment to advancing the principles of academic excellence and intellectual diversity.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenna A. Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jenna A. Robinson
President