

Testimony of Mytheli Sreenivas, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 29, 2023

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

My name is Dr. Mytheli Sreenivas, and I am Professor and Chair of the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Professor of History at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for eighteen years. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

Early in my career as a faculty member, a student shared with me these words from the poet Khalil Gibran: "The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of their wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind." I strive to put these words into practice in my classroom. My goal is not to tell students what to think, but to work with them to ask difficult questions, investigate answers, and grow their knowledge. SB 83's vague and confusing language about "intellectual diversity" will make this goal harder to achieve by resulting in less speech, not more. It will have a chilling effect in the classroom and reduce the quality of education that Ohio universities offer to our students.

As an expert in women's history, I regularly teach about topics that SB 83 identifies as controversial. In each case, I aim to teach students how to analyze controversial issues from a historical perspective, and how to employ evidence in support of their arguments. We often turn to primary sources—the material that is the basis of historical analysis. Students learn the skills to read and understand these sources, to connect them to larger historical claims, and to present arguments that are rooted in evidence. Sometimes, students disagree with each other in their interpretations, and that too is part of the learning process.

We teach history for many reasons, but among them is to help students become informed citizens who can make thoughtful decisions about the issues facing our communities. I believe my teaching, including on controversial topics involving gender and sexuality, contributes to this goal. However, SB 83, if passed into law, would discourage this kind of critical and open thinking and instead create confusion. Rather than teaching students how to come to informed conclusions about controversial topics, the law would discourage faculty from even raising such topics in our classroom. It would prevent, rather than support, education for citizenship.

As a teacher, I have tremendous respect and care for my students. It is an honor to be part of their academic journeys, and this is not a responsibility I take lightly. I welcome diversity of thought in my classroom, and I strive to create an environment where civic dialogue is the norm. My goal is to teach the skills of research, writing, critical reading, and historical analysis that enable Ohio students to understand our society's complex challenges. SB 83 offers nothing in support of these goals, and instead threatens much harm to Ohio students, and to the quality of higher education in the state of Ohio.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote No on this harmful and dangerous bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.