

Testimony of Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, Ph.D.  
Before the House Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
November 15, 2023

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

My name is Genevieve Ritchie-Ewing, and I am a professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Central State University, where I have taught for 5 years. I do not represent Central State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

While there have been improvements to SB83 by eliminating the no-strike provision and somewhat refining the language about specified concepts and specified ideologies, there are still several issues with this bill that impinge on academic freedom, faculty job protection, and union rights. These impingements will weaken the ability of Ohio state institutions to hire quality faculty for their programs and prevent faculty from encouraging intellectual diversity among their students. First, preventing faculty employees from bargaining over retrenchment, evaluations, and tenure will create an environment in which faculty jobs are dependent on the whims of trustees, administrators, and even students. Having a specific, weighted parameter for evaluations similarly produces situations in which faculty must cater to students rather than expecting students to strive for excellence. A faculty member that has high expectations for students, for example, may face termination for his/her expectations rather than his/her job performance. In addition, as universities become more focused on finances, faculty need to be able to apply pressure for conditions that benefit students both instructionally and personally such as smaller classroom sizes, advising and mentoring requirements, and appropriate teaching assignments. Eliminating the job protection for faculty precludes them from fighting for these provisions.

Second, intellectual diversity means having multiple viewpoints to consider. According to this bill, I can be disciplined for talking about critical race theory or not talking about critical race theory depending on how a specific student in my class feels. Switching out the phrases "specified concepts" and "specified ideologies" with "controversial beliefs and policies" doesn't eliminate this issue. Discussion of controversial beliefs and policies should be encouraged in college classrooms. With this bill, however, I cannot ask students to consider alternative viewpoints if I am concerned about how a specific student might react and the effect that could have on my job. I encourage my students to express their thoughts and opinions in my classroom, but part of my job is challenging their perspectives. As such, I present many different viewpoints that may or may not reflect my own. Having your perspectives challenged can be (and should be) uncomfortable, but it also fosters critical thinking skills that are vital for modern careers. I don't require students to agree with any specific viewpoint, but I always ask them to carefully and respectfully consider how others

think, a fundamental aspect of higher education. While I do allow students to reach their own conclusions, not every student in my class may perceive my challenges to their beliefs as an attempt to allow them to reach their own conclusions after considering other options. Since the language in the bill regarding students reaching their own conclusions is broad and unclear, I, then, again am faced with the possibility that I will lose my job if I ask students to broaden their perspectives.

Third, the requirement to make course syllabi publicly available generates unnecessary administrative costs for universities, many of which are already facing financial hardship. This requirement also opens up the possibility that faculty will be harassed by people who do not attend the university because they don't agree with the topics covered in a course. Faculty may be intimidated by these individuals, which, in turn, produces another situation that reduces intellectual diversity rather than safeguarding it. If faculty feel that they cannot present multiple viewpoints because of the perspectives of administrators, politicians, and the public, then intellectual diversity isn't possible in the true sense of the phrase. Intimidation never promotes intellectual diversity and this bill sets faculty up for intimidation on multiple fronts.