

April 18, 2023

OH SB 83

Opponent Testimony

The Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Salvatore Caradonna, Medical Student

Dear Chair Jerry C. Cirino, Vice Chair Michael A. Rulli, Ranking Member Catherine D. Ingram, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Salvatore Caradonna and I am a first-year medical student at Case Western Reserve University **testifying in strong opposition of the *Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act***. My testimony is strictly my own and does not represent any entity or organization in the State of Ohio.

As a graduate of both Ohio public schools and university from Olentangy Local Schools and The Ohio State University, respectively, the caliber of education in this state is a source of pride for me. I agree that intellectual diversity, freedom of thought and expression in independent intellectual inquiry, transparency in education, and maintaining healthy faculty working conditions are key for the success of Ohio state educational institutions. However, I vehemently disagree with many of the ways these aims are achieved in this bill.

Higher education should be a safe place where students can learn about any aspect of the world they desire. If we ban “controversial” discourse, we are preventing intellectual and personal growth, in addition to key analytical skills. Additionally, these topics are integral to multiple degree programs (such as climate change literature for environmental studies and foreign policy for international relations). Without formal education, Ohio graduates will be at a disadvantage when applying for employment or graduate programs that necessitate this experience and knowledge. Had this bill been enacted during my education, I feel that I would have been wholly underprepared for many aspects of my medical education.

Topics labeled as “controversial” by this bill were integral to my education at The Ohio State University, and aided me in my pursuits to become a physician. Through my courses I learned about climate change, which was further reinforced during my medical education as I learned about factors that can worsen human health, such as the connection between increased heat indexes and worsening lung disease. As a resident advisor for the undergraduate residence halls I took courses that emphasized promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion at the university, and the lessons I took away have been reinforced as I train to promote those same values in the clinic I practice. Without these topics I was taught during undergrad, I would be greatly disadvantaged in my medical education.

Ohio cannot advocate for intellectual diversity while also banning DEI programs. These trainings prepare students and employees to understand and respect each other in regards to core beliefs, thoughts, and actions. People come to Ohio universities from different cities, states and countries, with varying exposure to different groups of people. DEI programming can foster a sense of community and acceptance regardless of differences, which is integral for building a cooperative work and learning environment. I believe these programs have prepared me to succeed in my interactions with peers and patients as a student doctor.

While I understand the importance of professors being present to teach their students, I also believe professors who are paid appropriately and work in a supportive environment are capable of being better teachers. While striking takes professors away from their teaching time, we should acknowledge and improve upon their reasons for doing so. I fear that banning this bill would deter distinguished professors from teaching at our universities and detract from the quality of education offered to our students. As an applicant 9 years ago, the accolades and experience of The Ohio State University's faculty was exciting to me, and I imagine this is a common sentiment for many prospective students today.

This bill should be focused on improving higher education in Ohio, drawing more students and faculty into our wonderful state, yet I believe it will do the very opposite of this. Passage of this bill would be overall detrimental to Ohio students, which is why I urge the committee to **vote NO on SB 83**.

Sincerely,

Salvatore Caradonna