

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education
April 19, 2023

Lakaya Deegan, Undergraduate Student and Enrolled Tribal Member
The Ohio State University/MHA Nation Three Affiliated Tribes (Arikara)

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Lakaya Shae Deegan. I am a life-long resident of Ohio and a second year student at Ohio state. I am majoring in Sociology with a minor in American Indian Studies. I am writing to you today to express my opposition to Senate Bill 83. As a student enrolled in an institution of higher education, I find the ideals proposed in this bill to be in direct opposition to all of the things that I hoped to gain from my time spent at University. I grew up in Eastern Ohio near the Appalachian mountains in one of the many small towns that is housed within the state. I made a challenging and nearly unsuccessful transition to life in Columbus as a way to seek new opportunities and to expand my vision of the world I live in. Here, I have found an amazingly welcoming and diverse community where I feel involved, appreciated, and heard. I've come to understand SB-83 as a threat to this experience.

As an enrolled tribal member and as a leader within the Native community at Ohio State, I am especially concerned with the influence that this entire bill will have on the potential learning environment for myself, my peers, and my mentors. The emphasis on the unimportance of DEI programs and others that are similar causes me to question the true intention of the bill as it relates to educational equality and opportunity. Without the Center for Belonging and Social Change that is located on the Ohio State campus, I would be completely isolated in a state which already has no federally recognized Native American tribes or reservations, and without any Native/indigenous students to come together in community with. I will be the first to admit that these systems are not perfect, but this bill has the potential to reverse so much progress that has been made at Ohio State and at schools all across Ohio. It could be argued that the entirety of the American education system is already in shambles and deserves legislation that will uplift and improve it rather than further complicate it.

You hold the power and the influence to do what is best for members of higher education institutions, and it is for these reasons, and many more, that I ask for you to vote no on Senate Bill 83. I hope that you may consider what I've shared with you in your decision.

Thank You