

Testimony of Kirsten Halling Ph.D. Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education
Committee Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18, 2023

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

My name is Kirsten Halling and I am a professor of French at Wright State University, where I have taught for 22 years. I do not represent Wright State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private voting citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I am worried that this bill will damage higher education in our beautiful state of Ohio for many years to come by dissuading scholars in all fields from taking jobs in our fine institutions of higher learning. This bill, which was probably not intended as an attack on faculty, seems to point to a collective legislative distaste for academia and signals a fundamental misunderstanding of what faculty strive for in the classroom and beyond. While it is true that a very limited number of faculty may bully students with their opinions, I can attest that this behavior is rare and is never condoned by the 99% of faculty who believe in respectful conversation, debate, and a productive exchange of ideas.

Most university faculty would agree that life would be rather boring if everyone agreed, and we try to give students the tools to express their own opinions, rather than trying to change them. The grand majority of university faculty in Ohio take seriously our mission to educate not indoctrinate, but the tone of this bill indicates that even addressing important issues in a respectful manner in the classroom could lead to prosecution or dismissal. Knowing this and the culture of fear this bill will produce, it is understandable that future leaders in any discipline would hesitate to take a job at an Ohio university when they have other offers on the table in states where free speech is condoned. I urge you to withdraw this bill and to consider its long-term implications. This could be a very negative turning point for Ohio institutions of higher learning, and I am positive that this is not your intent.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Very respectfully,

Kirsten Halling