



Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 83
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Cynthia Peeples, Founding Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony against Senate Bill 83. My name is Cynthia Peeples, she/her pronouns, and I am the founding director of Honesty for Ohio Education.

[Honesty](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [50](#) organizational partners, and thousands of students, educators, and Ohioans who believe every student deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives. As a coalition, we also believe that education must reflect and celebrate all student identities, lived experiences, and cultures to maximize engagement and achievement. We believe that dismissing racism and discrimination, or minimizing its trauma and impact, irrevocably harms individuals and communities, and prevents pathways to reconciliation, growth, and healing. And we wholly believe that honest education is rooted in facts, science, and data – and is the freedom of critical thinking, reflection, and exchange of ideas essential for a vibrant economy and a high-functioning, multiracial democracy.

This is why we continue to oppose Senate Bill 83, House Bill 151, and similar legislative attempts to compromise honest education, muzzle academic freedom, and dictate the spaces we hold based on our race, sex, gender identity, gender expression, and religion. Despite a 7.5 hour opponent hearing with state record turnout and growing statewide condemnation of the bill, the sponsor chose to ignore Ohioans and introduce a substitute bill doubling down on its harmful provisions.

The re-introduction of these censorship measures across multiple legislative sessions is an unjustifiable waste of taxpayer time, money, and resources. Senate Bill 83, and bills like it, are not from Ohio, for Ohio, nor do they better Ohio. They are politically motivated efforts drafted by outside interests bent on micromanaging, manipulating, and defining what and how tuition-paying adults can learn, what and how trained faculty can teach, and how workers can advocate for safe and fair learning conditions.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education,¹ 34 similar bills have been introduced in 20 states across the country, illustrating just how wide-ranging and unoriginal these copycat, censorship efforts are. Thankfully, at least five of these bills have been tabled or rejected by legislators who value honest education and academic freedom.

Here in Ohio, SB 83 weakens academic freedom while professing to strengthen it by forcing a political narrative about “intellectual diversity” on faculty and administrators. Rather than cultivating learning environments that speak factually and accurately about complicated aspects of our shared history, modern realities, and complex systems of power, Senate Bill 83 seeks to whitewash history, both-sides uncomfortable truths, sanitize hate, and reduce our lived experiences around race and identity to “controversial beliefs or policies.” Meanwhile, the bill’s vague language and threats of disciplinary measures cast a chilling effect on education,² that creates a climate of fear and intimidation on campuses. At its core, Senate Bill 83 is a retread of three failed educational gag orders from the 134th General Assembly that Ohioans did not want.

Senate Bill 83 seeks to apply a “one size fits all” approach to higher education, imposing conformity on mission statements, course assessments, and student organizations where it should expand those freedoms. It ignores the diversity of our campuses and the pride each takes in their legacy of commitment to their own communities. Ohio’s home rule principle allows each campus to be independently guided by leaders and processes that reflect the communities and the students they serve. This should NOT change.

The bill’s broad language banning required diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and any segregating or grouping based on race, sex, gender identity, or gender expression demonstrates a gaping cultural blindspot and insensitivity to the safety, community, and sense of belonging these spaces provide. This provision will have a devastating impact on the college experience by targeting affinity spaces, race and gender-based majors and policies. Ironically, the DEI training

¹ Chronicle of Higher Education, “DEI Legislation Tracker.” <https://bit.ly/41Av6S3>.

² Washington Post. “Ron DeSantis shows how not to run an education system.” February 28, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/28/desantis-florida-school-performance/>

and programs this bill seeks to ban are exactly what's needed to move this bill from culturally incompetent to culturally proficient.

Further illustrating the cultural incompetency and overt racism of this "Enhancement" act, is SB 83's effort to ban academic relationships with China. This provision doubles down on targeted hate and violence against Asian American and Pacific Islanders, adding to the record surge of hate crimes inflicted on AAPI communities during the pandemic, as reported by the US Dept of Justice.³ Not only does this proliferate violent sinophobia, it also prevents invaluable cross-cultural learning opportunities and important global research. This ban would diminish the quality of our higher learning and put our academic institutions at a significant disadvantage to out-of-state schools that value international relationships, forcing our students, families, and educators to leave the state ... adding to the brain drain already happening in Ohio.

As a broad coalition, we are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with thousands of Ohioans boldly opposing Senate Bill 83 and HB 151 with phone calls, emails, meetings, town halls, rallies, op-eds, letters to the editor, publications, testimony, and grassroots community organizing. The lives and identities of our families and neighbors are not controversial topics, nor are they political currency for elected legislators to spend advancing a national extremist agenda.

We urge you to listen to Ohioans who DO NOT want this bill. It is bad for students, higher education, and Ohio.

Reject Senate Bill 83. Reject its companion, House Bill 151. Reject any attempt to fold this copycat legislation into the Ohio state budget. Listen to the People and help us build an Ohio that we are ALL proud to call home.

Thank you.

³ Department of Justice. "Raising Awareness of Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents During the COVID-19 Pandemic." <https://www.justice.gov/file/1507346/download>