

Testimony of Nathan A. Stevenson, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 15, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee: My name is Nathan Stevenson and I am a professor of Special Education at Kent State University, where I have taught courses on inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings since 2015. I do not represent Kent State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I am gravely concerned about the details in the SB 83 and its effect on the current and future faculty workforce in the state of Ohio as well as the impact on teachers training to work with students with disabilities in schools. My concerns are as follows:

1. Under the current text SB 83 would effectively ban instruction on inclusion as it relates to students with disabilities in general education settings. Federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (2004), establishes students with disabilities the right to curriculum, services, and instruction with their non-disabled peers. SB 83 would prohibit teacher educators from teaching courses that specifically focus on methods to promote effective inclusion and instruction of students with disabilities in general education settings. This would render teachers unprepared to teach students with disabilities in settings in which they are guaranteed access under federal law.
2. The Sub-section (D.1.b of Sec. 3345.45) on workload policies (lines 1016-1024) has been revised in such a way that it would increase the workload of Kent State's full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty on 9 month appointments by 25%!
 - a. This mandate, unilaterally imposed by the State, would be the single most radical change in the terms and conditions of employment of Kent State's tenured and tenure-track faculty in over fifty years.
 - b. This policy will also detract future faculty from wanting to be employed by Kent State University and other public Ohio universities across the state. Please consider the way in which Ohio can be the leader in higher education across the U.S. and reflect language in this bill that recognizes full time tenured/tenure track faculty that have 9 month appointments.
3. Although substitute SB 83 contains a provision (lines 892-895) that makes clear that it would not violate the law for a faculty expert to present content that involved a controversial belief or policy, specified concepts, or specified ideologies, the bill would still have a chilling effect on the academic freedom of faculty.
 - a. Of particular concern are provisions requiring that the detailed syllabi created by faculty for each of their classes be posted in a searchable format on the University's website in a way that is accessible to the public without any sort of sign-in or registration (see lines 656-699).
 - b. Public universities in Ohio are known for their reputation for being exceptional institutions. Allowing our syllabi/calendar of topics to be searchable by all will give away our intellectual property to other institutions in different states and/or across the globe.

Why would Ohio want to give away our intellectual property to competing colleges/universities across the U.S.? Please consider how Ohio can continue to lead higher education and reflect language in this bill that allows only admitted students to public Ohio universities to access our syllabi/calendar of topics. Registration for courses is a different and separate action from admission into our universities. Hence, allowing only those admitted (and paying tuition) to have access to information about courses provided by Ohio public universities will allow students to choose if they want to enroll in a course and be better informed.

4. The revised bill is an existential threat to the collective bargaining rights of faculty as it relates to eliminating the right to collectively bargain important terms and conditions of employment, and render moot the Retrenchment Article of the TT CBA. Please note, this resembles 2011's infamous SB 5 that was ultimately repealed in a citizens' veto referendum.

Sincerely submitted as a private citizen,

Nathan A. Stevenson, PhD
Associate Professor, Special Education