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Witness Form

Today's Date May 15, 2023

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Organization Representing: Myself

Testifying on Bill Number: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ SB 83

Testimony:  Verbal  Written  Both

Testifying As:  Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist?  Yes  No

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**Written Testimony For SB 83 Hearing on 5/17/2023**  
**David H. Weinberg**  
**Distinguished University Professor and Chair of Astronomy**  
**The Ohio State University**

I write from my perspective as a 28-year faculty member at Ohio State and chair of the department of astronomy. I joined Ohio State as an assistant professor in 1995, and I have risen through the ranks to become a Distinguished University Professor, the chair of my department for the last seven years, the convener of the President's and Provost's Advisory Committee, and (as of this month) Ohio State's newest member of the National Academy of Sciences.

I have read the Substitute Senate Bill 83 in its entirety. The negative impacts of SB 83 on higher education in Ohio would be numerous, wide ranging, and severe. I will focus specifically on the destructive impact it would have on the faculty of Ohio State University and Ohio's other public universities.

In my field of astrophysics, as in many others, Ohio State has built a world class program by hiring some of the world's most brilliant young researchers, then retaining them for decades as they grow in stature to become leaders of their subjects. As a department chair, I am aware that every year I must work to retain my best faculty against competing departments at other universities that would love to recruit them. In years that we hire a new faculty member, I am faced with the major challenge of recruiting our top-ranked candidates against offers from highly regarded competing institutions.

If SB 83 becomes law, Ohio State will become drastically less competitive in recruiting faculty, and we will steadily lose our best current faculty to other universities. The reasons are straightforward: SB 83 will make the job of Ohio State faculty more burdensome and less rewarding, it will make it difficult to build strong research programs because of its negative impact on federal and foundation funding, and it will make it difficult to recruit outstanding graduate students because they will choose to go to states that are not outwardly hostile to research and academic achievement.

Almost every aspect of SB 83 will contribute to this negative impact, but the most severely destructive aspects are its legislative micromanagement of faculty workload policy, performance evaluation, and post-tenure review.

The faculty I know work extraordinarily hard, on classroom teaching and grading, student mentoring, research, public outreach, and service to the department, the university, and the national community. We choose academic careers because we love what we do, and the long and irregular hours come with the territory. As department chair, it is my job every year to flexibly adjust assignments in response to changing needs, external demands, and individual circumstances. By removing this flexibility with rigidly defined workloads, SB 83 will make it all but impossible to run a department effectively. The language of the bill betrays complete ignorance of the ground-level reality of what professors do, day-to-day and year-to-year. The language would also make Ohio State faculty positions in many fields (e.g., science, engineering, business) non-competitive with those at other universities because we would afford drastically less time for faculty research.

We obtain student evaluations of every class, and we pay attention to them in annual performance review, but we also know how to weight them relative to our own assessments of teaching quality. Every professor knows the way to boost average student evaluations: reduce the course's workload to a minimum, and give lots of A's. This low-standards, high-grades practice is what SB 83 will encourage, but it will make the actual *education* of students worse, not better.

The many-year process of earning tenure is arduous, but the benefit for the individual and the university is the ability to take risks with ambitious efforts in research and teaching, which sometimes don't work out but sometimes pay off in spectacular fashion. The proposed changes to tenure policy will eliminate this benefit, since any faculty member can lose their job by getting on the bad side of a department chair or dean.

Above all, if SB 83 becomes law then there is no reason that a prospective faculty member would choose to come to Ohio State instead of taking a position at another strong research university that does not treat its faculty badly as a matter of state policy. Conversely, the current faculty who are the most capable and energetic are the ones who will leave for other institutions. We will remain capable of awarding bachelor's degrees, but we will steadily lose our position as a world intellectual leader and an engine of Ohio's economy.

Historical examples show that building a great university system takes decades but destroying one takes only a few years. Once Ohio State's best faculty start to leave, the decline will be swift. I regard my role in building one of the nation's top astronomy departments as one of the great achievements of my career, and I have been hoping that this achievement will stand long after I retire. It would be a tragedy for this achievement, and similar achievements in myriad other fields, to unravel because of poorly constructed state legislation. In my three decades at Ohio State I have been through many ups and downs, but research and teaching have gotten steadily stronger throughout. SB 83 and HB 151 are the first developments that make me truly worry that we have peaked, and that the progress of Ohio State's recent decades will fade into a wistful memory.