

Testimony of Dr. Chris Crews
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
May 30, 2023

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

My name is Dr. Chris Crews, and I am a professor at Denison University, where I teach in the International Studies and Writing programs. I am also the founder of Ohioans for Critical Race Theory, and I am submitting my testimony in this capacity in opposition to Senate Bill 117.

Similar to the previously introduced SB 83 and HB 151, there are many problems with this bill and its attempts to forcibly impose far-right political ideologies under the guise of promoting "intellectual diversity" and "intellectual freedom" in higher education. As with these earlier bills, SB 117 is a bill seeking to create a problem where one does not exist while posing as a content neutral set of policy solutions. Yet nothing about this bill is neutral, despite what its sponsors continue to claim.

As someone who spends most days in an Ohio college classroom teaching a wide range of topics to undergraduates, from politics and economics to history and culture, I regularly engage my students on a diverse set of political issues, and from a wide range of political perspectives, in order to help them deepen their understanding of the world around them. I do this by helping them learn how current structures and systems came to exist in our world today, and how to critically think and analyze these systems and the larger world around them. In all of this my goal is to help them become actively engaged and informed citizens, not passive consumers who simply accept what those in power tell them to think. So contrary to your bill's stated aims, professors like myself are already promoting intellectual diversity and freedom of thought every day in Ohio universities.

As was made clear by the sponsor testimony, as well as testimony of proponents of this bill in earlier hearings, this bill is simply one more piece in the larger far-right culture war and attacks on schools and critical educators that the Republican party has been spearheading. And as those testifying in support of the bill have made clear, the goal of this and related bills is not, in fact, to promote intellectual diversity, but rather to force far-right ideologies into our classes by legislative fiat.

This is particularly ironic given the Republican party has spent decades claiming to be the party of small government—the party that opposes unfunded mandates and government overreach—yet time and time again what we are seeing from Ohio Republicans is exactly that. Bills banning what we can teach, talk about, think, believe, act, and do, from classrooms to locker rooms to libraries to our own bedrooms, more and more restrictions and bans and exclusions—yet someone they always seem to be in the name of "freedom" or "liberty" or "rights".

George Orwell had a name for exactly such authoritarian indoctrination tactics in his famously prophetic book *1984*—doublethink. This bill, just like SB 83 and HB 151, are prime examples of bills that claim one thing while doing the exact opposite. Therefore I urge you to say NO to Senate Bill 117.

Thank you.