



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Higher Education Reform Lays a Solid Foundation for Ohio's Future

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House Higher Education Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 83

Greg R. Lawson, Research Fellow
The Buckeye Institute

December 6, 2023

As Submitted

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding reshaping Ohio's higher education system to meet the needs of the 21st century.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am the research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

American higher education has long been the envy of the world. Unfortunately, rising tuition costs, administrative bloat, speech codes, and a lack of ideological academic diversity have tarnished higher education's reputation for properly preparing the next generation. Many of these problems are systemic or cultural and will not be solved with policy changes overnight. But policy reforms can play a part and **Senate Bill 83** lays a solid foundation on which to build.

The bill, for example, reinforces support for the First Amendment by amending university mission statements to positively reaffirm a commitment to free and open intellectual inquiry, independent thought, and viewpoint diversity. The bill would curtail **questionable mandatory** trainings on campus that smack of **compelled speech**, have proven **ineffective and counterproductive**, and been **criticized** by leading academics in the area of implicit bias. These and other reforms have become regrettably necessary as 80 percent of surveyed students **report** self-censoring, and professors and visiting lecturers are infamously **shouted down** or administratively **punished** for their opinions or allegedly violating campus "speech codes." Such incidents erode taxpayer confidence that their public colleges and universities remain intellectually diverse and open to an honest exchange of ideas.

Senate Bill 83 would also improve faculty tenure policies over time by requiring robust post-tenure reviews. Tenure provides significant benefits for faculty and students insofar as it secures rigorous academic debate, intellectual inquiry, and independent research. But tenure can also protect staff who stifle academic inquiry and debate, and it contributes to bloated payrolls by **failing** to align financial incentives with job performance.

Florida's recent post-tenure reform **legislation** goes further than Senate Bill 83 and offers Ohio an example to emulate. It mandates five-year reviews of all tenured faculty, regardless of annual evaluation ratings. Such reviews—if done carefully and without infringing on academic freedom—could help keep faculty accountable and spur productivity. Alternatively, as Dr. Richard Vedder has **suggested**, tenure could become an optional component of faculty compensation, allowing universities to pay more to those who *voluntarily* choose not to accept tenure's protections.

Senate Bill 83's other notable improvements include generally disallowing public university faculty to collectively bargain over faculty workload policies, faculty evaluation systems and policies, post-tenure review policies, and policies on tenure and retrenchment. A broader anti-strike position would be even better, but this proposed rule improves upon the status quo.

These are timely steps in the right direction, but the General Assembly should take several more.

Ohio should cap the bloated administrative expenses at state universities that make college even more expensive for families and taxpayers. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni **found** that from 2010 to 2018 the cost of noninstructional spending has grown three times faster than classroom spending. In February 2023, it was **reported** that The Ohio State University had nearly 132 employees in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices alone at a cost of \$13.4 million per year. Whatever their merits, these are not instructional positions to prepare and equip students to meet the challenges of the 21st century workplace, but they do add to the tuition bill.

If state-funded universities want to receive generous taxpayer support, the General Assembly should reasonably restrict university expenses. Schools that exceed those limits should see their state share of instruction (SSI) allocation reduced by an equal amount. Ohio should also align the SSI's two- and four-year state funding streams with better post-graduation outcomes, financially rewarding schools that graduate students with more manageable debt-to-earnings ratios and better workforce credentials.

A more dramatic reform would take a page from the school choice playbook and give vouchers directly to students rather than simply subsidizing colleges. Policymakers should not underestimate the transformative strength of a free market that empowers students and incentivizes universities to compete for students and state dollars rather than rely on an opaque and complex subsidy formula.

Senate Bill 83 should help address some of the problems plaguing Ohio's higher education system, but much work still remains to reduce costs, align institutional incentives, and better prepare our students for tomorrow.

Thank you for your time and attention.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

The Buckeye Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit, and tax-exempt organization, as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code. As such, it relies on support from individuals, corporations, and foundations that share a commitment to individual liberty, free enterprise, personal responsibility, and limited government. The Buckeye Institute does not seek or accept government funding.

