Dear SOA members,

I am contacting you on a matter related to our work as Public Historians: history advocacy. As a co-chair of the Advocacy and Outreach Committee, I keep SOA members abreast of relevant issues related to archives in Ohio. I am reaching out to you all today about Ohio Senate Bill 83 (SB-83). This bill targets state higher education institutions. Although it does not explicitly include archives, its implications for US history and government courses are dire. My main concern is to talk with you all about how this bill will impact history, which DOES affect us.

SB-83 is full of contradictions and will limit freedom of speech, which we all would agree is entirely undemocratic. While the bill claims to support intellectual diversity, it becomes clear that the true intent is to control subject matter and how certain topics can be discussed in the classroom. SB-83 attempts to whitewash history and oversimplify the truth. This reduces the lives and experiences of non-white people by making their truths seem too controversial for students to learn about and discuss. Last time I checked, history is full of controversy and is not meant to make us feel warm and fuzzy. Sometimes, history leaves you feeling angry, horrified, or just plain sad – for your own experiences and for others. As a former educator at an Ohio community college, this bill aggravates and concerns me about the education of our college students. What worries me most is that classes could be developed by boards of trustees rather than by educators, limiting the academic freedom of professors at Ohio’s universities.

In November 2023, the American Historical Association (AHA) submitted a letter to the Ohio House Higher Education Committee voicing their concerns over SB-83:

“This bill takes fundamental decisions about the content and structure of a core general education course out of the hands of qualified faculty and departments, forcing educators to prioritize the wishes of the state legislature over the needs and interests of our students. From our vantage point, the course requirement in this legislation will do more to boost the rate of failure in general education courses than to improve the civic and historical awareness of Ohio’s public university students.”

The letter is rather lengthy, but I highly encourage you to take the time to read it. <https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-submits-testimony-opposing-ohio-sb-83-(november-2023)>

I hope you will take this knowledge and be compelled to contact your Congressperson to voice your concerns over SB-83. The bill is currently in the Ohio House, so please get in touch with your local house member. Don’t know who to contact? To search for your state representatives, visit <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/members/district-maps>.

If you want to do more to make an impact, you can volunteer with the League of Women Voters (LWV) <https://www.lwvohio.org/> or the Ohio Conference NAACP <https://ohnaacp.com/>.

Sincerely,

Collette N McDonough

Collette N. McDonough, CA

Co-chair of the Advocacy and Outreach Committee

Society of Ohio Archivists