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Bill Number/Topic: HB 2428, the “Freedom From Indoctrination” Act

Position: Opposed

Testimony: Oral in-person

Date of hearing: Tuesday, February 3

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am a professor at a public university in Kansas, and I received the education that qualifies me to teach here at the University of Wisconsin. At the highest point on the UW campus, there is a plaque that reads as follows:

“Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.”

When I moved to Kansas eight years ago to become a public university teacher, I believed that I would find those same values here, and for eight years, I have found them. In my research and in my teaching, I have followed the evidence where it leads, and I have been confident that my administrators and my legislators would defend my responsibility to do so—even if the evidence leads me to say things that are unpopular or offensive. That’s academic freedom.

I understand that the intent behind HB 2428 is to promote ideological diversity in Kansas public colleges and universities. I agree with the proponents of this bill that indoctrination is the antithesis of ideological diversity: it is anti-intellectual, anti-democratic, anti-freedom. I disagree, however, that this bill is the right way to prevent indoctrination.

I ask you, congresspersons: what if the evidence leads us to conclude that we must teach about social justice, about systemic racism, about gender-based violence? How can you be certain that there is no truth in these concepts? And if there is the potential for truth in them, how can you prevent us from exploring them with our students? By the language of this bill, if a student in my required theory-and-method class chose, of their own free will, to do an independent research project on a topic that the bill classifies as DEI-CRT, I would have to forbid them. How is that freedom from indoctrination? How is that freedom of any kind?

I am a staunch defender of the First Amendment and the right to freedom of speech. I believe that, in most cases, the best solution to bad speech is *more* speech, not *less* speech, that the free marketplace of ideas will sort out truth from falsehood if people are given free reign to engage in civil dialogue with one another. The university classroom is the ideal place for this kind of discourse. As faculty, we invite our students to sift and winnow along with us, to take the knowledge we present to them and use it to draw their own conclusions about the truth.

HB 2428, despite its good intentions, places limits on what students can learn from their faculty. Under this bill, we will no longer be able to sift and winnow. We will only be able to serve our students pre-sifted gruel from the state’s trough. Our students deserve better than that. Their future employers need more than that. Our sacred democracy demands a higher commitment than that.