

Good Morning

Thank you for taking the time to listen or read my testimony

My name is Ian Matchett, I am the Co-Director of the Michigan Student Power Network, which works to connect, train, and organize students on campuses across the state. I am here today to voice clear and urgent opposition to the the pending legislation HB 4436. This bill has been framed by its supporters and sponsors as a necessary addition to defend student speech, intent upon returning the constitution to our campuses. While I would applaud the intention, the actual wording of this bill seems to be far less about protecting student voices and more about enforcing a unilateral and unnecessary policy on our state's colleges and universities, so as to protect the ability of far right speakers to use them as a platform.

First, this legislation is unnecessary. Colleges and universities are already governed by the constitution of the United States, with its protections for free speech. When universities have overstepped these bounds, they have been repeatedly checked by lawsuits and organizations like the ACLU. This is the system working. There is not a crisis of free speech within the campuses. Students today freely express conservative, liberal, reactionary, and radical views, all within the bounds of existing university policy. The exceptions to this have been few, and when they have come it is largely in the form of speakers whose intent is not to spread legitimate ideas and engage in debate, but to promote openly genocidal, extreme racist, or hateful views. And to promote these views flanked by supporters, and in in such a way, to the point where their presence posed a safety and security risk to people on campus.

With this in mind, I would like to turn to the text of the bill, in particular the section 3 (iv) which states:

*A statement assuring any person lawfully present on campus the right to protest or demonstrate there but making clear that protests and demonstrations that substantially and materially infringe upon the rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity are not permitted and are subject to sanction.*

How is this broad language intended to protect free speech on our campuses? With such a general definition of what type of opposition should be sanctioned virtually any opposition by students on campus could be framed as an acts that "substantially and materially infringe.." This language seems more interested in mobilizing the university to punish student opposition to speakers than it is in protecting free speech on campus.

It also seems unlikely that the timing of this legislation is random. Just last year students at UM and MSU faced far right speakers in the form of Richard Spencer and Charles Murray. and staged successful actions to challenge their presence on their campuses. Murray and Spencer

hold views that seek to justify the ethnic cleansing or racial stratification of our society and that implicitly or explicitly advocate genocide. In the case of Richard Spencer his views and speeches are accompanied by literal nazi supporters who attend his speeches and have a history of violence against those who disagree with them, or indeed simply those who are not white. Fascist and other hate groups like this use the university as a recruiting platform, seeking to impose their views on the campus, draw attention in the media, and thereby draw more support.

I find it troubling that this legislation is brought up now, on the heels of these far right tours, and framed in such a way as to empower speakers over both the university and the student body. I don't want to believe that the bill's framers are supporters of these hateful ideologies, but in its current form, the legislation reads as a reaction to the opposition faced by these alt-right speakers, and seems intent on holding the door open for them and the violence they provoke.

Finally, I just want to touch on the material outcome of this legislation. If passed in its current form, this legislation would force most colleges and universities to rewrite their campus policies, retrain their staff and students. These policies would become more stringent, and as I've outlined above, diminish the free speech of students on campus in favor of invited events and sanctioned speakers. And what will happen when one of these speakers inevitably decides to take advantage of this legislation? Students will be punished. I think we can all hope that fascism and other ideologies of hate will always provoke resistance that may "*substantially and materially infringe*" on their activities. This legislation will not keep students home from protesting, it will only magnify the punishments meted out to them.

In summation, we have a unnecessary bill, solving a problem that doesn't exist, in order to protect far right speakers that advocate and enact violence on students and their communities. There is a huge potential that with its current vague framing the bill would only result in stifling the speech of students and community members in favor of those far right speakers. If that language is made more exact, and thereby constitutional, then the bill would become essentially an assertion by the legislature that the constitution applies on college campuses- which is already does.

Please reject this legislation, and any similar attempts to curtail student and community voices. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter,

Ian Matchett