



**Opponent Testimony of Clara Conover, Ohio Student Association
Senate Bill 1
House Higher Education Committee
March 6, 2025**

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Clara Conover and I'm a proud lifelong Ohio resident who's had the privilege of enjoying our state's top-notch public higher education. When I testified against this bill's predecessor in 2023, I was a junior in college working on two bachelors degrees and my masters degree at Miami University. Now, in 2025, I've since finished my degrees and am back at the statehouse testifying against the same bill, now as Lead Organizer for the Ohio Student Association.

OSA is a statewide grassroots organization with student-led chapters across the state, bringing together young Ohioans from different backgrounds and with different experiences to imagine and fight for a better future. We strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 for its attack on academic freedom, its erasure of programs that support underrepresented students, and the gag order it places on educators.

As an organization of students from all walks of life, we value education as a critical mechanism of social mobility. Having high-performing and competitive Ohio universities is what sets students up to succeed. One of our core values is supporting college students to make their voices heard in the fight for their futures, whether that be outside the door of the press gallery chanting so loud that we disrupt your press conference, or at this podium today delivering testimony. You are not listening to students. But I am, and so are the student organizers who are here today. Students across our state are deeply concerned about this legislation and what it would mean for our campuses and classrooms.

Instead of creating "intellectual diversity," this bill pushes an extremist agenda that we never asked for (and even turned out 500+ pieces of opponent testimony to actively oppose in 2023). The Ohio Senate Republican Newsletter called student protesters 'young indoctrinated minds of mush,' Senator Cirino alleged that we were 'probably getting extra credit' for protesting and has repeatedly told us that we haven't read the bill. A proponent even said we need 'adult supervision'. Senator Cirino has also said that our opposition was 'organized by faculty,' yet we speak loudly for ourselves in defense of our futures in a state that we believe in.



If this bill is passed, professors will be mandated by the state to '*encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies*' in lines 672-674. Per lines 600-604, that requires neutrality on anything and everything that could be deemed 'controversial'. This bill will chill the speech of professors who are terrified of losing their jobs for even being perceived as taking stances. This is all in the name of defending the rights of a suspiciously quiet "silent majority" of students (that if you ask us, doesn't exist) to bring conspiracy theories into the classroom without consequence.

Not a single public university student has ever testified in support of this bill or its previous iterations, but over 1,000 people testified against SB 1. SB 83 did not pass for a reason. You will hear today from students that a bill like this would have heavily impacted their college decisions and feelings of belonging on campus. You are looking at the potential of not only driving bright young people out of our state, but never attracting them to begin with. Students in Ohio will not receive the same quality of education and ability for free thought and inquiry that other states offer, and that will be this committee's legacy.

No one wants to go to the state with holocaust-denier flat-earther universities where it is illegal for professors to teach the truth. If an environmental science student could receive an Ohio degree while never being corrected as a climate denier, that undermines the quality of our degrees, much less the quality of our classroom debates. Students are beyond capable of having critical and challenging conversations that teach them what they need to know for life, and mandating an anti-science and morally revisionist gag order is a disservice to academic freedom.

Our college classrooms will become Petri dishes ripe for the incubation of bigotry, pseudoscience, and reactionary fanaticism if professors no longer have the authority to unwaveringly ground higher education in fact and truth.

I said this the first time I testified, and I'm saying it again. If this bill passes, there will be more open parking spots on Ohio's campuses. There will be empty dorm beds and quiet quads. We will watch an exodus of Ohio's best and brightest, both students and faculty, and we will watch our once pristine degrees become laughingstock on the national stage. If Ohio is not educating for our real lives in the real world and cutting through 'controversy' to reach the truth, it is failing every student.