

Testimony of Gabriella Modan, PhD
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Gabriella Modan, and I am a professor of linguistics in the English Department at the Ohio State University, where I have taught for 25 years. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

As a professor at a land grant university, it is my job to provide a quality education for all my students, to meet them where they are at, and to make the classroom a welcoming environment where all my students feel empowered to talk, share their perspectives, and learn together through interaction. I have found that the most profound learning occurs when students discover that their peers sometimes have completely different ways of understanding the world. Exploration of different views – both from each other and from the course material – leads to a rich understanding of fundamental scientific concepts. To provide a mundane example from my English linguistics class, when I present an example sentence like “the laundry needs folded,” some students are shocked to find out that their peers think this is a perfectly normal sentence, while others are shocked to find out that their peers think it sounds ungrammatical and ignorant. Being confronted with this difference in grammatical judgement helps students to understand language acquisition, cognition, and linguistic variation, which is a fundamental component of language in every corner of the world. Another name for linguistic variation is diversity; another name for creating a welcoming learning atmosphere for all students is inclusion. In my field, equity is also a critical component of the course material; without engaging with the concept of equity, it is impossible to understand the fights about whether English was a good enough language to use for government administration and science – a fight which explains why English has so many French and Latin words; language pundits felt the only way to make English seem good enough for such functions was to make it sound more like French and Latin. Diversity, equity and inclusion are thus necessary components of education, for without them we cannot provide educational equity. What I mean by this is that we cannot provide an equally good education for all students, which is the mission of a landgrant university. It should go without saying, but seems to be often overlooked, that a pedagogical approach that embraces diversity necessarily creates space for students to express conservative views. In other words, a diversity approach protects conservative speech.

It should also go without saying that it is the mission of a university to help students engage in controversial subjects. As scholars and scientists, we know that engaging with controversial ideas is what leads to the production of new knowledge. It is what makes universities places of innovation that bring progress. While SB1 claims to promote "intellectual diversity," its goal is to legislate the manner in which certain topics can be addressed. It is my sincere hope that Ohio

representatives see through this sham to realize that that is exactly the opposite of promoting intellectual diversity. Such proscriptions have a chilling effect on academic freedom and will make it more difficult for Ohio's colleges and universities to attract and retain students and faculty.

SB1 also poses a threat to academic freedom through its mandate of "post-tenure review." This is completely unnecessary to maintaining quality education, as all post-tenure faculty already have an annual academic review. Given the already existing administrative checks and balances to make sure that post-tenure faculty are doing their jobs and meeting their responsibilities to their students, the inclusion of post-tenure review in SB1 seems little more than an ideological litmus test and an imposition of more administrative busy-work which takes us all away from the work of educating our students.

In all these ways, SB1 is set to erode the quality of higher education in Ohio, making it more difficult to recruit high-caliber students, faculty, and administrators. This is not good policy for strengthening the economy of the state. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject SB 1.

Gabriella Modan