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210N Center for Architecture and Environmental Design
Kent State University
Kent, OH 44240

Tom Young, Chair
House Workforce & Higher Education Committee
77 South High Street, 11th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

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

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill Number 1 (SB 1). As an Associate Professor of Architecture at Kent State University, I strongly oppose SB 1.

It never occurred to me to communicate with members of congress before this dangerous legislation emerged. After personally testifying to the Senate Higher Education Committee last month and witnessing Senator Jerry Cirino's testimony to your committee on Tuesday, however, I feel compelled to respond for the record with some urgent clarifications.

Senator Cirino claimed that if this bill is signed into law, faculty and students will "flood into Ohio." No one directly involved with higher education could ever believe that would happen. In fact, this legislation would put the state of Ohio at major disadvantages within an increasingly competitive national and international academic marketplace. I have served on and chaired numerous student admissions committees and faculty and administrator search committees at leading universities in multiple states. From these experiences, I can guarantee (and I *never* use that word) that this legislation would quickly damage our ability to recruit the best students and faculty here in Ohio.

Word of mouth travels fast in contemporary academia. The impressive academic rankings that Representative Joe Miller referred to on Tuesday are based on the votes and assessments of faculty and administrators at competing institutions. Any legislation that limits academic freedom in Ohio would therefore drive down the rankings of Ohio's public universities and be used as a recruiting narrative by competing institutions in other states. In my own field of architecture (which Senator Cirino repeatedly identifies as a growth industry), recruiting is based primarily on reputation. Architecture students do not choose their school and then decide their major. They actively seek an ascending program whose academic quality will equip them with competitive skills and whose reputation will support their professional success.

Approximately one third of KSU's architecture students come from out of state. This means we are not only competing with the other four accredited architecture programs at state universities in Ohio; we are also competing with other respected regional schools including Ball State University, Carnegie Mellon University, Michigan State University, Penn State University,

University at Buffalo, University of Michigan, etc. For the past decade, KSU has been surprisingly competitive with these other schools because we have been able to recruit world-class faculty. This has been possible because the best faculty have started to see KSU as a place where they can do their best work. Broad academic freedom is frankly necessary for this to happen. If SB 1 were to become law, it would signal the beginning of a decline in the quality of public education in Ohio. Our best faculty would leave for more supportive universities. And our best prospective students would choose competing institutions in other states.

To me, it is unconscionable that Senator Cirino—someone who is only peripherally familiar with the specific protocols and traditions of higher education—would disregard the testimonies of hundreds of academic experts who have long been working to advance Ohio’s cultural and economic prosperity. As faculty members, we work with students and administrators every day to conduct cutting-edge research, ask (and sometimes answer) the most difficult questions, and develop innovative pedagogical and curricular models for academic excellence. It is almost impossible to overstate how little political partisanship has to do with any of this. I remain confused by Senator Cirino’s assertions that faculty are somehow imbuing students with one-sided political biases. He presents no statistical evidence, refuses to work with experts, misunderstands what constitutes data, and cannot point to a single case of similar legislation improving academic quality. Still, for some reason, he asks us to take a leap of faith based on his inexperienced personal predictions.

Crucially, Senator Cirino’s misguided attempt to force public universities to adopt his preferred business model does not recognize the actual marketplace. *Universities are not competing with other businesses; they are competing with other universities.* For Ohio’s public universities to remain competitive, we must maintain academic freedom to ensure academic excellence. It is crucial to note that for-profit universities (which seem to be Senator Cirino’s preferred structural model) are notoriously compromised places where faculty are expected to agree with inexperienced owners and executives to keep their jobs. This is why tenure and collective bargaining are essential for academic integrity. SB 1 is anti-union, anti-free speech, and anti-expertise. It would do irreparable harm to the academic quality, reputation, and financial outlook of Ohio’s public universities.

I hope you will end this damaging bill by voting “no” on SB 1. Please let me know how I can help you directly with this effort. This legislation would seriously damage higher education in Ohio, and I will do whatever I can to make sure it does not become law.

Sincerely,

Jon Yoder, PhD, Associate Professor
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