

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Submitted by: Laura Micciche, PhD
Organization: n/a
Testifying as Opponent

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Laura Micciche. I live in Cincinnati, OH, and I am a professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for 21 years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati. I am a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

As it stands, SB 1 includes vague language that does not serve student learning. For example, controversial beliefs are defined as “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion.” This non-definition of “political controversy” generates many unanswered questions. Would, for instance, election denial, climate change denial, e-cigarettes, Kendrick Lamar vs. Drake, electric vs. hybrid cars, and/or the use of Ozempic for weight loss constitute “political controversy”? All have been taken up in public discourse as political controversies. The baggy definition of what counts as political controversy—and “intellectual diversity” as well—seems designed to confuse and threaten rather than to clarify and improve learning conditions.

When reading the section on “DEI bans,” I think about a student I’ll call Maria who took my first-year composition class. A first-generation white college student from an Appalachian community, Maria had earned a scholarship to attend college—otherwise, she would not have been able to afford it. She wrote movingly of her desire to become a secondary-education teacher serving a community like hers. I fear that, because Maria’s scholarship was based on her economic status and her standing as a member of an under-represented group, she would not have the opportunity to attend college. This is one of the potential consequences of the blanket language around “DEI” that fails to define the very term that is being banned. As such, this part of the bill recklessly redlines educational opportunities for citizens without regard for specifics that really matter. In general, the whole bill lacks specifics and evidence-based support of how the proposed changes will enhance or improve student learning. In that way, SB 1 creates a bogeyman of education in Ohio.

Overall, SB 1 represents government micro-management (without a compensation model for those who will be conducting the suggested surveillance) from a remove. I invite Senator Cirino and co-sponsors to Ohio campuses to see what is actually happening in classrooms. Rather than relying on broadsides about “DEI” and “liberal politics” that circulate without context or evidence, come see what students are learning, come *talk to* students. You will meet many students like Maria who want an education of substance that is not legislated by Ohio senators but is delivered by content experts focused on student-centered learning above all else.

I respectfully urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote NO on SB1. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.