

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

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Richard Finlay Fletcher, I am a British-born US citizen, Ohio voter, and associate professor at Ohio State University in the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy. I am here today to offer my testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1.

While I am testifying here as a private citizen, my decision to focus on the curricular provisions of this Bill is informed by my ten plus years of work on the Curriculum Committee in the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. This body and its panels of faculty members and staff (which also include members from across the university), enacts an impressively meticulous and rigorous process of approving new and revised courses and degree programs, general curricular evaluation and assessment. Furthermore, as a standing committee of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate, we are responsible for the approval and oversight of General Education requirements in our college and in an advisory role for the whole university. Our curriculum is abundantly diverse, and our curricular processes are committed to enriching the learning of all students at OSU.

It is through my role in maintaining curricular rigor and abundance that I oppose the imposition of a compulsory 3-credit hour course in American Civic Literacy, which has replaced the course in American Government or History from Senate Bill 83. For good reason, there is no one single course that is required for all students at Ohio State, but an expansive array of General Education requirements. Furthermore, for any course taught at OSU, it would require so much more than a list of readings to get approved. We look for assessable learning goals, scaffolded assignments and a detailed schedule of class content and focus across our curriculum. Any new course takes careful work, respectful dialogue and multiple rounds of proposals and revisions to pass through our curriculum committee. Not only does the proposed course fail to meet the most basic of curricular requirements, but there are also no entities either within or beyond OSU who can bypass this important level of curricular oversight which ensures a quality education for all students as they prepare to be citizens for a just and diverse world.

As with so much in this bill, this unnecessary course requirement demonstrates not only an obliviousness to the workings of higher education, but also a troubling level of carelessness and shady dealings in its creation. The course requirement and many parts of this Bill are basically cut and pasted from so-called model legislation generated by a shadowy think tank parading under the lofty title of the National Association of Scholars – specifically their American History Act.¹ If we want to see how this disingenuous cookie-cutter approach to legislation plays out when bills become laws, we need look no further than Senate Bill 117 which is currently being implemented.

Back in 2023, SB 117, which failed to have any hearings in its this committee or in the House, and was surreptitiously smuggled through via the budget, imposed so-called ‘intellectual diversity’ centers on the campuses of several public Ohio universities, copied from the National

¹ <https://civicsalliance.org/higher-education-civics-reform/american-history-act/>

Association of Scholars' School of Intellectual Freedom Act.² At Ohio State, in an unprecedented move, the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture and Society was established by the Board of Trustees against the will of the students, staff, faculty and administrators of the University Senate who voted against it for concerns over its fiscal viability and its breaking of established operational processes at the university.

The Chase Center not only lacks legitimacy from within the university, but it is operating in a deeply shady way that Ohio taxpayers would be appalled to learn about. The Chase Center director, Lee Strang, who got the top job in the state through flagrant nepotism after basically initiated the legislation in the first place, is making backroom deals with individual faculty and administrators, frenzied hiring staff and faculty bypassing rigorous processes, wherein job talks have been hidden from faculty and students. Strang has even tried to bribe our students – using taxpayers' money – to engage with the Chase Center, offering \$7500 in prizes for a 90-minute essay writing contest that sounds more like a middle school debate club activity than something worthy of our distinguished university.³ But worse of all, Strang has been attempting to lay the groundwork to create curriculum at the Chase Center that not only duplicates already established offerings at the university but also bypasses the usual structures of shared governance over the curriculum.

This is where the current legislation comes in. There is a direct interest convergence between the imposed Civic Literacy course and the Chase Center, so if this Bill passes, one failing, careless and unnecessary legislation will prop up another! I have no doubt that this imposed Civic Literacy course will join the Chase Center is a ghostly isolated and redundant – not to mention expensive – presence within the curricular landscape of OSU. Our students cannot learn civic literacy through nefarious legislative overreach, whether it happens once or twice. The only way our students will learn to be citizens for a just and diverse world is by taking the abundant course offerings of experts within the university with whom they are in mutual and beneficial dialogue.

As Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmer writes:

“A perception of abundance, based on the notion that there is enough if we share it, underlies economies of mutual support.”⁴

This is the way we work together at the university – this is our rich and ongoing practice of more-than-civic literacy - and the limiting imposition of a narrowly defined and poorly thought-out skeleton curriculum of scarcity, fear and precarity, used to bolster a failing, unwanted and illegitimate entity like the Chase Center, has no home in our public places of abundant higher learning.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on Senate Bill 1. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

² <https://civicsalliance.org/school-of-intellectual-freedom-act/>

³ <https://chasecenter.osu.edu/events/undergraduate-student-writing-contest>

⁴ <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-serviceberry/>