

Testimony of Danielle Fosler-Lussier
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 Danielle Fosler-Lussier, and I am a Professor of Music at The Ohio State University where I have taught for 22 years. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather I am submitting testimony as a private citizen **in opposition to Senate Bill 1**.

The Ohio State University's motto is "**Education for Citizenship**," and we must educate students to be thoughtful in their approach to relevant social concerns. We do not indoctrinate students; we do offer them factual information and depictions of social concerns through fiction and the arts so that each student can understand these concerns and empathize with other people's perspectives about them. Students must learn about the society they live in.

This bill seeks to "correct" problems that do not exist. There is no limitation on free speech in the current practices of Ohio's public universities. There is already vigorous and thoughtful debate on our campus. We do not use political or ideological "litmus tests" in hiring or in accepting students. Faculty workloads are not determined by the faculty's political or other commitments. Faculty performance is already reviewed annually. Teaching is already evaluated by students and through peer review. No one is forcing anyone to believe anything inside or outside our classrooms.

The "controversial belief or policy" provisions in this bill institute a chilling effect on free speech, and they are a violation of faculty's right to teach the material of their disciplines. The unspecified "sanctions" against faculty are a direct threat to faculty freedom of speech and intellectual inquiry. Faculty must be able to correct students if students state incorrect facts or voice opinions that are not backed up by evidence, without being afraid that they will be attacked. The legislature should not interfere in this educational process.

The "intellectual diversity" provision in this bill threatens to put material into courses that doesn't belong there. Faculty have expertise and subject matter knowledge in their disciplines. No one else, including the legislature or administrators who are not subject matter experts, should be adding content to these courses under the excuse of "balance." Restricting faculty speech will result in poorly educated citizens. It would be nightmarish if faculty were asked to teach "both sides" of an

issue where one “side” consists of facts and the other is false. Under this bill, faculty may be punished if they teach factual information. It is easy to see that faculty who teach certain subjects, like Women’s Studies or Jewish Studies, may be singled out for scrutiny under this provision.

These provisions, along with the provision about posting syllabi, will result in the harassment of faculty. Course content is already approved by committees within departments and colleges; it’s been vetted. The requirement that syllabi be posted is an invitation to online trolls to harass any faculty who are teaching subjects they disagree with.

The “American civic literacy” course provision is inappropriate, unnecessary, and expensive. Students who graduate from high school in Ohio have already completed at least 1/2 unit in American history and 1/2 unit in American government, so these concepts have already been covered. Further, the faculty at Ohio State have already recently overhauled the General Education program. Changing it again will be expensive, particularly as we would have to hire many faculty to teach these extra required courses. Will the legislature provide funds for the added courses?

The provision about persons being made to feel “discomfort, guilt, or anguish” will lead to a great deal of turmoil and it may be used aggressively to retaliate against teachers or administrators. Institutions have no practical way to address how people feel about facts. Permitting complaints about “being made to feel” a particular way gives complainants wide latitude for aggression, and it is impossible to defend oneself against accusations that are about feelings. This is a bad provision, and again, it addresses a supposed “problem” that does not exist. The frivolous complaints that will be submitted will take administrators’ and teachers’ time, and therefore cost money.

Weakening tenure and collective bargaining protections does nothing to improve the quality of education. Indeed, faculty will leave the state for better jobs, as has already happened in Florida. Ohio citizens care about the quality of our universities.

I ask that you oppose Senate Bill 1/ House Bill 6.

Sincerely yours,

Danielle Fosler-Lussier