

Testimony of Elizabeth Kolkovich, 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 Elizabeth Kolkovich, and I am a professor of Shakespeare and English literature at the Mansfield campus of Ohio State, where I have taught for 15 years. I do not represent Ohio State; I submit testimony as a private citizen. Thank you for the chance to do so.

I oppose Senate Bill 1, a bill that would hurt Ohio and some of its most vulnerable citizens. I teach at one of the state's open-admissions campuses. Like the other hard-working people at my campus, I believe strongly in access to education and a better life. I have seen that happen for many of my past students whose college degrees pulled them out of poverty. Most of my students do not have the resources to seek education outside of Ohio. We are their only chance.

What concerns me the most about SB1 is its use (and prohibition) of the terms "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" without defining them. To me, "inclusion" means accessibility for my many students with disabilities, including those who suffer from PTSD from military tours. To me, "diversity" means giving my students access to literature from multiple voices that empowers all of them to find their own voices. It means intellectual diversity too – welcoming different perspectives in class so that students learn how to engage in civilized, productive discussions with people who disagree with them. To me, "equity" means treating all my students with dignity and justice.

Instead of encouraging more intellectual diversity, the vagueness of SB1 would lead to muzzling and fear. I want my students to blossom, to be creative and thoughtful. I don't want them to feel silenced, especially because so many of my students feel left behind by local governments and our society.

I am also deeply disappointed in how this bill misunderstands what happens at Ohio campuses, underestimates my students, and mistrusts my colleagues and me. In my 15 years at OSU, I have not seen indoctrination. Our students may have little in terms of financial resources, but they are smart and self-aware. They think for themselves.

Higher education is far from perfect and could use reform, but SB1 is not the answer. It will create more bureaucracy and unfunded mandates—things that direct resources away from the classroom and Ohio's students. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on this bill.