

Testimony of Iris Patton, BA East Asian Languages and Cultures

Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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

I'd like to start out by thanking you for the opportunity to provide a written testimony. For the past 3 years, I have worked as an Administrative Assistant at the Miami University Regionals campuses for the Regional Tutoring and Learning Center. Miami is my alma mater, and I take great pride in serving the institution that shaped me. That being said, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen, and not a representative of Miami.

This bill adds no provision that is not already addressed by university infrastructure. University personnel are federally required under Title IX to divorce their personal beliefs from their treatment of their students. And in the event that they cannot, formal channels for complaints also already exist. Students at any university can freely and directly approach department chairs with complaints, and escalate to the Dean of their college when needed. For concerns of indoctrination or harassment, Title IX Coordinators assist students with formal reporting and pursuing legal action thereafter. This includes students who are not considered "diverse" by the general definition. Any white student, Christian student, or cisgender student can also file a complaint if student, staff, or faculty attempt to prohibit them from exercising the liberties afforded to them by the Constitution. This is publicly-accessible knowledge. If you called any student-serving office on campus, whether you were a student, a parent, or a community member, the staff would share that information readily.

The impulse to circumvent this infrastructure concerns me. By suggesting that the study of any specific social, political, or religious point of view could be considered "indoctrination," this bill directly threatens intellectual diversity. First-generation students, transgender students, and international students of mine are already censoring themselves on graduate school applications for fear that they will be denied if they state their personal identities as motivation for acquiring education. Thanks to the ambiguity of what is considered "indoctrination," I myself am now facing the very real possibility of having complaints lodged against me for simply including my pronouns in my email signature line, or talking to students about my experiences as a nonbinary person and a queer person. On more than one occasion, a student has walked into my office and directly told me my existence a "trend," and that people like me should be prohibited from receiving legal protections. Am I meant to stay silent? If I disagree with them, and they file a complaint, I think you know which of us is more at risk to receive punishment.

Despite being a member of a minority group, I am concerned for those in majority groups, too. Even my Christian students and colleagues keep quiet about their religious affiliation in the classroom out of worry that their ideology might be interrogated unfairly. I have tutored several students on how to present their beliefs in academically-sound ways precisely *because* academia is the best stage for a free exchange of ideas. I want them to be able to receive special scholarships and state their religion on the graduate school application proudly. I want that for every person of every race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and religious belief. But this bill *cannot* and *will not* fulfill that desire. SB 1 does nothing except legally canonize a pillory that any student, staff, or faculty member could be placed upon at the whim of a single student.

Additionally, I find it incredibly counterintuitive that the bill authors tacked collective bargaining and strike bans onto this bill. Unions are integral to retaining the most experienced and qualified personnel at a university. If personnel are not paid what they feel they deserve, and they cannot bargain for increased pay and better working conditions, they are more likely to leave. This directly reduces the quality of service that students receive, both inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps this provision was included in an effort to spend tuition dollars more wisely. However, scrambling to hire less-experienced personnel to fill the holes left behind by seasoned experts is an unwise and unnecessary expense. The labor cost is especially steep, sometimes including dozens of hours of labor across multiple departments for every single job search.

I truly believe this bill adds nothing meaningful to the infrastructure of education. SB 1 only poses potential harm to students, staff, and faculty from all backgrounds. It injects fear into the one space where all Ohioans should feel safe. I implore you to oppose this bill in its entirety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Iris A. Patton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Iris A. Patton