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Dear House Committee Members:

As a member of an Ohio History department that would be profoundly affected by SB 1 should it pass, I write to ask that this bill not be brought up for a House vote in its current form. SB 1 too closely aligns with the misguided administrative arguments of Republican governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, that public higher education has become a key front in DeSantis's "war on woke." My experience suggests much the opposite.

But what counts as woke? The answer isn't clear, but that lack of clarity is, in a way, the point of opposing SB 1. Teaching students anything that might be considered biased, especially if politically liberal or progressive (aka "revisionist"), could be construed as wokeness. SB 1 requires the teaching of foundational events and texts in US history, including The Federalist Papers and MLK's Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Yet these contain numerous passages that could easily be characterized as biased and progressive. Fundamental topics would be put under unwarranted scrutiny. One Florida professor "was told not to teach that the Civil War was a conflict over slavery." This slipperiness creates a climate of fear that inhibits teaching on many subjects and appears to be driving out some of the state system's best teachers. So too SB 1.

I try very hard to present the "hard history" of slavery and race as objectively as possible, not privileging it over other essential subjects of our history. I do not, and never have, taught the subjects of my expertise in a partisan, politicized manner for the purpose of "indoctrinating" my students. I believe this bill invents a problem in search of a partisan solution.

Please do not bring this bill to the House floor in its current form.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christopher Phillips".

Christopher Phillips
John and Dorothy Hermanies Professor of American History
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