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

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. I regret that I cannot present something in person. My name is Dr. Tom Sahajdack. I am a non-tenure track associate professor of Economics at Kent State University, though I testify today in my capacity as a private citizen. As a NTT faculty member, I focus my efforts on teaching. My whole career is built specifically on providing the best educational experience for my students that I can, especially preparing them for their future careers and to be happy, healthy, intelligent threads in our great American tapestry. With this in mind, I feel compelled to share testimony that **I am sincerely and emphatically opposed to Senate Bill 1**.

There are numerous pieces of this legislation that deeply concern me. To be clear, there *are* problems in higher education: it is too expensive, but simultaneously many faculty and staff are often underpaid and overworked; demographic shifts strain already tight budgets; anti-education sentiments are rising; risk of stagnation exists in large institutions; etc. To his credit, Senator Cirino points out several of these things and some others in his testimony. But the changes proposed in SB1 fail to meaningfully address the very issues the Senator identifies. SB1 does not even deliver on its premise and so it is simply **bad policy.**

Allow me to address a selection of the highlights that Senator Cirino specifically chose to mention in his testimony.

1. "SB 1 is about more speech, not less" – Despite this claim, the wide and varied consensus is that this bill does the opposite. The reason Senator Cirino must continue to insist on and reiterate this point is because, despite his best attempts to convince us otherwise, it simply does not do so. If it was clear that this created more speech, it would not be a continually contentious claim. And this is *not* because some views are discriminated against, as he would like to convince you, but rather because the execution is bad policy with ambiguous, overreaching and ideologically motivated restrictions that deeply chill free speech. It is **bad policy.**

2. "It is about the core value that students come first" – Despite this claim, there is almost nothing in this bill that directly improves student experience or lowers student costs. The only thing that comes close is a half-baked concept of a plan to explore a 3 year degree. If Senator Cirino wants to look into this, then do so. Attaching it to a bill full of other things that increase costs feels like an empty gesture. And to be clear, the other requirements in this bill will *certainly* raise compliance costs for universities at an already perilous budget time. If a new environmental reporting regulation was passed, would members of the committee expect a private business' costs to decrease when complying with this new law? Why then would we assume anything different in this case for Ohio universities?

   As far as improving student experiences to put students first, I concede that there may be a small number of students who feel personally insulted by having their beliefs challenged (though I note that proponents of the bill could only seem to find one actual

student to provide positive testimony and that one would not even be affected by the bill), and that there are undoubtedly some professors who don't handle these interactions as delicately as one might hope. I have to emphasize though that there are already processes in place to file complaints in the case of egregious behavior by either professors or students. Furthermore, the process of challenging our beliefs is essential to growing as a member of society even when those challenges make us uncomfortable or force us to reexamine a long-held position. I even think that the authors of the bill agree with me on this latter point, so it is mystifying how they reached the final product on offer when coming from the same starting point. For instance, tariffs are an ongoing topic of discussion right now and something that my students are asking for help to understand. But how can I teach my students that wide-reaching tariffs are likely to increase prices when their politicians are telling them the opposite and advocating for that very thing? Does this committee truly believe my speech will be free and unrestricted under this bill when that is the environment and that students will get the best possible education as a result?

Senator Cirino would have you believe there are exceptions when sharing consensus, but those exceptions have built-in exceptions as well: "so long as faculty members remain committed to expressing intellectual diversity and allowing intellectual diversity to be expressed." Who decides this? What are the conditions for its application? What is the associated punishment? With so many unanswered questions, the reality is that I would be deeply afraid of expressing any conclusion that goes against political leadership, even if factual and consensus based, in the current political environment. I have never felt afraid to share any evidence-based conclusion in my classroom in the way that I will be afraid to do under this bill, regardless of whose political policies it may have been indirectly in opposition to. Indeed, when democrats advocated for tariffs in the cold war era, economists led the charge against them then. This bill *does not* protect my speech pr my ability to teach so, in execution, it is **bad policy** for students. They will be robbed of important education due to the overreach of government into their classrooms and universities.

3. "Diversity of thought is imperative in the delivery of a proper education" - I believe others will provide more far-reaching rebuttals of the anti-DEI elements of the bill, so I will only talk about it in context of my own discipline. In my field, DEI efforts were the solution to a clear problem and outright banning them is so incredibly short-sighted that it boggles the mind. The number of women faculty members in economics based on 2020 data is 27% (Brookings Institute[1]), well below the 50.5% of the population in the 2020 census. Only 2% of academic economists are black, well below the 12% or so portion of the general population. Beyond these already dismal numbers, women and minority academics are less likely to be full professors than men and more likely to be non-tenure track faculty.

   So, I must ask the committee, are men and whites somehow naturally better at economics? Do my skin color and gender provide me with some inherent advantage in understanding market behavior, data analysis and economic principles? I hope that it is self-evident that this is utter nonsense. Instead, a much more reasonable explanation is that there are barriers or other societal factors preventing marginalized groups from wanting to or being able to join the field. DEI efforts are not designed to lower standards,

despite demagogy on the subject, but rather to increase participation and access by extending invitations to groups who have not historically had a seat at the table. And always to *increase* intellectual diversity by trying to bring new experiences and mindsets in the field, something that Senator Cirino and other proponents of this bill seem to fundamentally misunderstand. DEI efforts, while not always perfect, do the very thing Senator Cirino is attempting to do with this bill. If you think they have "gone too far," then restrict them, do not ban them outright. Taking them away will do the opposite of the Senator's stated goals and so this bill is **bad policy.**

4. "We will have established an environment of true diversity of thought" – Senator Cirino and other proponents of this bill are happy to promote the idea of free inquiry, healthy debate and the marketplace of ideas. And true, there are some cases where the debate on an issue is not settled and I believe, in general, most academics are honest about communication those ideas with our students. But what happens when some ideas "win" the debate? What happens when two competing ideas are offered and based on evidence, data or argumentation, one of the two emerges as the more accurate, realistic, or convincing? It is not diversity of thought to continue to present flawed ideas as if they are equally valid. This bill prevents universities from taking a position on a variety of topics. Some of these seem, depending on implementation, to be genuine cases where there are two valid perspectives that are driven by competing worldviews. But this bill does not limit *some* of the things on that list. It limits *all* of them!

   Climate change, for instance, is not a debate within the scientific community. Not because one side has been suppressed, but rather because the debate was had, and the strong and clear evidence for man-made climate change, from across a wide variety of disciplines, won that debate. It is political only in the sense that some politicians have chosen to make its denial a key part of their platform, in spite of this evidence. It is not intellectual diversity to continue to pretend that "both sides have a point." Instead, a real debate can be had about *what to do about it*. And that, genuinely, is a debate worth having where two sides may have valid arguments. This bill prevents such a debate by precluding the entire conversation.

   Many foreign policy issues can have multiple valid perspectives, but for some, those perspectives are *not* all equally valid. As I mentioned earlier, tariffs are foreign policy. Economists have done a lot of research on tariffs and their effects. We know that tariffs raise prices. The debate was had, and a consensus emerged because one conclusion was better than the other based on our evidence. And yet if a politician were advocating for tariffs and tried to claim for political reasons that it will help lower prices, academics would be powerless under this bill to educate our students and the public. This link, for instance, comes from the University of Chicago[2] (the same University of Chicago Senator Cirino uses in his testimony) and shows that unanimously among leading economists, experts do not believe widespread tariffs to be a good idea. This kind of expert analysis is vital to adequately prepare our students for the public square and yet this kind of link could not exist from an Ohio university under SB1 since it is posted by the Booth School of Business directly and not an individual professor. It seems Ohioans will have to outsource their

expertise to other states who are still allowed to comment on such things, directly in opposition to Senator Cirino's testimony and goals, and so this is **bad policy.**

Again, to all committee members, even if you sincerely believe that some of the things on the "controversial topics" list should be genuinely up for debate and that those debates are not happening, though I would disagree with the premise that the debates are currently restricted, even then this bill does not limit universities on some of those topics, it limits them on **all of them,** which is incredibly dangerous and ambiguous. In the senate testimony of this bill, Senator Cirino responded to some concerns in this vein by saying that the controversial topics list could change and evolve over time and that, for instance, maybe the continued production of the penny would be controversial in the future. I believe he meant this as a lighthearted, flippant attempt to ease concerns and deflect attention away from the current topics list. But this ambiguity and lack of clarity is not at all reassuring. In fact, this terrifies me even more. The idea that basically any topic could become "controversial" assuming a politician wants it to be so is deeply, deeply troubling and should worry all of us.

To close, please allow me to desperately remind the committee that *you do not have to vote for this bill!* Changes to post-secondary education are coming and there are certainly changes that should be made. But they do not have to be done in the way they are presented by this bill! Despite some admirable stated goals, Senate Bill 1 fails to live up to its promises in all regards. Even if you agree with every single concern and goal identified by Senator Cirino, the bill before you is poorly executed and counterproductive to many of those same goals. It is simply **bad policy**. Senator Cirino and any others are welcome to try again, but **this is not the answer for Ohio.**

I humbly ask you to please consider my testimony and vote no on this flawed bill. I am happy to provide any further information I can. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tom Sahajdack

Associate Professor, NTT

Kent State University

[1] https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gender-and-racial-diversity-of-federal-government-economists-2020-data/#:~:text=economists%20in%20the%20federal%20government,of%20economics%20faculty%20in%20academia.

[2] https://www.chicagobooth.edu/review/what-economists-think-about-import-taxes