

Testimony of Amy Cruickshank, MA in English  
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 Amy Cruickshank, and I am a professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for almost 25 years. I do not represent Tri-C, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

As a lifelong Ohioan, I have often heard the term “brain drain” applied to our state. Many of our best and brightest leave the state for college or attend one of our great institutions of higher education in state and then move away. In fact, Governor DeWine’s latest budget makes clear this is an issue for him. During a press conference he gave after revealing the budget details, which include a continuation of the Governor’s Merit Scholarship, he said, “this scholarship will continue to encourage Ohio’s best and brightest students to stay in the state of Ohio and go to college. These kids will much more likely then stay in Ohio, get a job in Ohio, be Ohio citizens and be productive members of society.” It’s clear that combatting Ohio’s brain drain is an important priority for Governor DeWine and, I suspect, most of Ohio’s legislators.

SB 1 will do the opposite.

The bill is a solution in search of a problem. Most faculty, including me, already encourage diverse opinions and perspectives while providing a space where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas. As an English professor, I teach students how to argue a position. Of course, I get students who don’t always agree with the ideas or positions we discuss, but because I am a professional those moments become useful examples about listening to the other side and debating in good faith. Students are not penalized in my class for having differing opinions; in fact, I encourage it. And while I can’t speak for all faculty, I know that most of my colleagues approach controversial topics in their classrooms the same way. We aren’t interested in indoctrination; we value multiple views because that’s how students, and yes, even we faculty, continue to learn.

But SB 1 takes that dynamic and turns it into something potentially suspect, implying that faculty haven’t been open to diverse opinions or that we spend our time trying to indoctrinate students. Yet, other than a handful of anecdotes, the authors of this bill have provided no tangible evidence of this being a widespread issue.

The bill also infantilizes students and implies they aren’t capable of handling controversial subjects or opposition to their opinions or the sometimes-uncomfortable reality that their views may change. That has not been my experience as an educator. We need to give more credit to our students’ abilities to make sense of their world.

In fact, even students themselves can see right through this obvious attempt at trying to silence views that many members of the current administration don’t support. Students showed up en masse to protest the earlier version of this bill, SB 83, and returned to protest when it was reintroduced a couple months ago. But instead of praising these students for their civic mindedness, for caring about the future of their state and their education, instead of being open to diverse opinions, Senator Cirino said in an interview, “The students that were out here protesting are probably getting extra credit for being here. I don’t believe that they have studied the bill and all the implications of this legislation and the impact on higher education in

Ohio. I believe that they were asked to be here by their professors.” **I wonder if Senator Cirino thinks all of the hundreds of students who protested across Ohio against SB 1 just this past week were all doing it for extra credit.** Someone should remind him that his condescending attitude towards Ohio’s students is not the best strategy for encouraging them to stay in Ohio and reversing the brain drain.

And passing a bill that will create more problems than it solves won’t help either.

It’s clear from the more than 1000 people who submitted opponent testimony, and the more than 200 people who showed up in person to testify against the bill during February’s hearings, that SB 1 is unpopular and dangerous. For the sake of our citizens and our education system, and to ensure we start to reverse Ohio’s brain drain, our legislators must reject Senate Bill 1.

Thank you,

Amy Cruickshank