

Testimony of Stephanie Sadre-Orafai, Ph.D.
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Representative Tim Young, Chair
March 7, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Stephanie Sadre-Orafai, and I am a professor of Anthropology at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for 15 years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Freedom of inquiry, shared governance, and the ability for workers to withhold labor when conditions are unjust are foundational prerequisites for the work universities do in nurturing a functioning democracy. These specific guarantees and commitments, made possible by AAUP-UC, drew me to the University of Cincinnati in 2010 and have guided my work with students, colleagues, and members of the public over the past 15 years. SB1, like SB83 before it, is a misguided, purposefully vague, and contradictory overreach of the state that will destroy higher education in Ohio.

University classrooms changed my life. Growing up in Tennessee in the 1990s, I was taught Creationism alongside Earth Science in 8th grade. I was taught “both sides” of the Civil War by my high school AP History teacher who wore Confederate flag paraphernalia nearly every day. Sitting in on a Biological Anthropology class while still in high school, I learned the truth about evolution and science, backed by generations of researchers incrementally building and testing the knowledge that came before them, shaping it into disciplines and fields that were so much broader than the purview of my secondary school instructors. I learned that race and gender were socially constructed, evidenced by the myriad constellations and forms they had taken across space and time. I did not return to high school for my senior year, opting instead to jointly enroll at my local university.

Being in classrooms with students like and unlike myself broadened my perspective. It gave me a language to describe and analyze the world, and courage to act when I saw injustice. This bill is unjust. It will hobble the horizons of Ohio students. Its direct attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion will make these spaces more hostile, more homogenous, and less free. In dismantling fundamental labor protections currently enshrined in our collective bargaining agreements, it will draw talented faculty away from the state, impoverishing educational opportunities for Ohioans.

I respectfully urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote NO on SB1.