

**Testimony of Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee**

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Workforce and Higher Education Committee
OHRWorkforceAndHigherEducationCommittee@ohiohouse.gov

RE: Opposition to SB1

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

My name is Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste. I have taught American Sign Language and Deaf Studies at the University of Cincinnati for almost 14 years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati; rather, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I write to you today as an educator, a community member, and someone who has dedicated their career to fostering access, inclusion, and excellence in higher education. I am gravely concerned about the implications of Senate Bill 1 and urge you to consider its long-term consequences on students, faculty, and the very institutions that prepare future generations for civic and economic participation.

If you were to meet me in person, I am confident you would find a dedicated educator—one you would trust to teach your children and grandchildren. I work tirelessly to ensure that all students, including those who are Deaf and hard of hearing, have equal access to the high-quality education they deserve. Senate Bill 1's sweeping restrictions, particularly those aimed at banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, would undermine the fundamental rights of these students to an equitable education. DEI is not about political ideology—it is about ensuring that every student, regardless of background or ability, has the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

The bill's failure to define DEI leaves institutions vulnerable to arbitrary enforcement and punitive funding cuts. If we eliminate efforts to make education accessible to historically marginalized groups, we risk deepening inequalities and failing our students. The United States thrives because of its diversity, and it is through exposure to diverse perspectives, students develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to excel in a competitive workforce.

Additionally, Senate Bill 1's attack on tenure protections and faculty rights is deeply troubling. The ability of administrators to call for "post-tenure review" at any time, combined with the prohibition on collective bargaining over evaluations and retrenchment, effectively strips faculty of due process and job security. Quality education depends on educators who can research, teach, and mentor without fear of politically motivated retribution. A strong economy relies on an innovative and well-educated workforce cultivated by faculty who are free to explore new ideas and challenge students to think critically.

Further, the requirement to post syllabi with faculty contact information, dates, and locations unnecessarily exposes faculty and students to harassment and physical danger. This is not a matter of

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transparency—it is a threat to safety. Our institutions should foster an environment of open inquiry without making educators and students targets for intimidation.

Regarding the mandate for an “American civic literacy” course that prioritizes capitalism and Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, I agree that students should be well-versed in economic principles. However, omitting other perspectives—such as critiques of capitalism and alternative economic models—does a disservice to the intellectual diversity this bill purports to support. True education does not prescribe ideology; it encourages students to explore, analyze, and form their own informed opinions.

Finally, eliminating academic programs that graduate fewer than five students per year disregards the vital role of specialized fields in driving innovation, culture, and economic growth. Many disciplines with smaller enrollment numbers, such as signed language interpreting, contribute significantly to research, community engagement, and workforce development. By prioritizing raw numbers over intellectual and societal value, this bill jeopardizes the depth and breadth of higher education.

Higher education should not be a political battleground. It should be a space where students of all backgrounds can learn, grow, and contribute to society. Senate Bill 1, as written, threatens that mission. I urge you to reconsider the long-term damage this bill will inflict on our institutions, our workforce, and our democracy. If you take the time to listen to those of us on the frontlines of education, you will find dedicated professionals who want nothing more than to provide students with the best possible future.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste