

Testimony of Michelle Nicopolis, PhD, LPCC
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 8, 2025

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

My name is Michelle Nicopolis, and I am a professor of psychology at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for nearly 19 years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 1/House Bill 6 (SB1 hereafter) because it is unnecessary in aiming to require faculty to meet contractual obligations, but we already have that requirement in our union contract. SB1 also represents everything counterintuitive to enhancing student learning by restricting their personal narratives and undermining academic freedom. Students in my classes enjoy sharing their life experiences as a diverse group who learns more about themselves and others as a result. My classroom is one where facts are supported by empirically based scientific research, and opinions are not facts.

What is the fear of a college classroom? It seems the concern is that folks will learn to think for themselves outside of a bubble. Senator Cirino said, *“Parents are afraid when they are sending their child to a university, they’re afraid of what is coming back”* and the fear is *“indoctrination”*. Wouldn’t that be just what you’re proposing if you support SB1? Only teaching certain topics, not discussing others? Assuming only those who are in the majority category of all demographics can contribute to a productive society? Tell your daughters, sisters, mothers, and grandmothers that.

At first, my parents were concerned when I went away to college very impressionable. After we discussed topics in college that I’d never been exposed and meeting folks I differed from on a variety of levels, my parents began to understand and were thankful that I was educated as a first-generation college graduate. I brought friends home to visit who were different than those in my hometown, and my parents welcomed them. Challenging my views forced me to think. It strengthened my own values in many ways, all the while broadening my view to understand my fellow humans’ experiences. My parents had open minds and hearts to understand the world was bigger than the bubble they lived in and what they might be *“indoctrinated”* with. There was no threat. There was pride in education and me living in a more “God-like” way – appreciating, affirming, and respecting all other people as human beings first. I truly learned to love ALL my neighbors.

I ask those who may be in support of SB1 and afraid of what college “does to a student”: were you a college student? Apparently, college didn’t indoctrinate you into something you didn’t want to be.

This type of exposure to diverse, critical thinking is how we come up with cures for disease, new technologies, new careers, peaceful productive communities and neighborhoods. Any health career programs, medical schools, counseling/social work/psychologist training classes that discuss human experience will be especially volatile and accreditation will likely be lost under this restriction of education. Lives will be lost – students will not feel welcomed, they will not learn about diversity of healthcare and provider experiences, about diseases that affect certain people more than others. We will live in a more divisive, dangerous climate as we did pre-Civil Rights and pre-Women’s movement.

Perhaps, that is what you deem a healthy way of thinking? With conformity of thought comes a death our local, State, and National societies on intellectual, moral, mental and physical safety, occupational opportunities, and exclusion and even death by suicide when we further erase those most marginalized (veterans, LGBTQ+, people of color) as data strongly supports.

If you truly are against diversity, equity, and inclusion, don’t just hide behind the DEI acronym. Please say exactly what it is you do not like and who you do not want supported. Is it women, people with differences in ability, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community? What harm is giving folks the ability to live up to the standard of The Declaration of Independence which states, “*All men [people] are created equal*”? It seems by your affirmation of SB 1 that you would agree we’re all CREATED equal but should not be TREATED as such. That’s something our founders would not be proud of, nor should you.

You are welcomed to come to my classroom anytime and experience what happens in higher education.

I can’t urge you strongly enough to OPPOSE THIS BILL in the interest of our students, our institutions, our neighborhoods, the future of Ohio’s workforce, the future of our State, and the future of our Nation.

Enthusiastically,
Michelle Nicopolis, PhD, LPCC