

Testimony of Nicholas A. Booker
Before the House Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
11 Mar 2025

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

My name is Nicholas Booker, and I am a concerned citizen and a veteran of the US Army National Guard who was born in the United States and have lived here my whole life. I'm also a graduate student at The Ohio State University. I do not represent The Ohio State University or any other organizations; rather, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Let's cut to the chase: this bill would have disastrous impacts on the Ohio economy, the cultural and intellectual landscape of our state, and the freedom of Ohio's residents. This isn't just about universities. It's about what's best for everyday Ohioans.

The Inter-University Council of Ohio reported that in the 2021–2022 fiscal year, Ohio's public universities delivered \$68.9 billion in total economic impact, representing 8.8% of Ohio's total gross state product. Our work matters for Ohio's economy. Last month, over 800 people, including myself, testified in opposition to this bill in the Ohio Senate. We told the Senate that this bill would be bad for Ohioans. Many students and faculty told members of the Senate about the "brain drain" this bill would create, and we are here again promising you that many of us will leave Ohio if this bill passes. You don't have to speculate. I am standing here telling you I will leave the state if this legislation passes. Imagine if just a few of us follow through on that and leave Ohio. Imagine if universities lose grant funding, programs downsize, and the economic impact of Ohio's public universities drops by 2%. A 2% decrease would mean that economic impact would be reduced by over \$1.3 billion. That's billion with a "b." If, as I think is more likely, a more substantial number of students and faculty leave the state and go to one of the many other universities in the United States and abroad that are available to us, Ohio could see even more dramatic impacts on the lives of everyday folks.

What will happen when you are up for re-election, and voters experience the disastrous economic impact of this legislation? What will happen when they experience the negative impacts on innovation, culture, and intellectual freedom in Ohio?

The reality is that SB 1/HB 6 is an attempt by a small group of lobbyists and politicians to limit what Ohio's citizens are allowed to learn, and it is only a matter of time until Ohio voters hold their elected representatives accountable for that fact. There is an alternative, however. You could reject the bill and instead have meaningful conversations with students at Ohio's universities about what we need today. We could be future workers, innovators, and voters in this state. Yet, the bill would destroy many of the freedoms that I, as a student, rely on to gain the skills I need to get a job and contribute to my community and the Ohio economy as a worker and citizen. So, I implore you to reject it.

It is only a matter of time before Ohio voters realize that the founders of the United States, like Thomas Jefferson, would be ashamed of Senate Bill 1 and HB 6. In his 1779 "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," Jefferson warned that even in the best forms of government, "those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny." To

work against that turn toward tyranny, Jefferson wrote that we need to “illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people.” He wrote that we should learn subjects like history, reading, and writing. Senate Bill 1 would have disastrous effects on my ability to study those subjects that Thomas Jefferson fought so hard for.

SB 1 and HB 6 would allow special interest groups to silence students they disagree with, limit our freedoms, and censure our conversations in Ohio’s places of learning. I take pride in being a Buckeye, but Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 6 would make our university less competitive nationally and internationally, and it would inevitably mean that Ohio students become less employable, less educated, and less free. Does freedom matter to you? Does it matter to your voters?

The bill says that on the board of trustees of The Ohio State University, *my* university, “Student members shall have no voting power on the board.” Please don’t take away the rights of students to make decisions for ourselves. I have always had valuable conversations as a student at my university about difficult issues, but this bill would take power away from students to decide for ourselves what “controversial beliefs” we can and can’t study. This would open the door in Ohio for the sort of tyranny Thomas Jefferson warned us about in 1779, and I am asking you today to reject that option. I am asking you to act in the best interest of Ohio voters, maintain the positive economic impacts of Ohio’s public universities, and follow the advice of this nation’s founders by voting no on this bill. Thank you.