

Testimony of Benjamin Morgenstein, M.A.  
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 Ben Morgenstein, and I am a professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for 24 years. I do not represent Tri-C but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I stand in firm opposition to Senate Bill One because it would create an expensive bureaucracy to address a “problem” that does not exist while seriously damaging the quality of education in Ohio for potential students. The cost to taxpayers from implementing this program and the resulting exodus of faculty and students would be staggering.

The bill frames education as an adversarial relationship between faculty and students, that students must be protected from indoctrination. The absurdity of this framing would be quickly apparent if any of you witnessed mine or my colleagues’ teaching. A vast majority of our students are happy to be in college. If you speak to our students, it would be clear that we already “encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies.” Our classes are rooted in students’ understanding and employment of facts and evidence to help them formulate their own beliefs—that’s our job as educators. Will Ohio also introduce bills requiring painters to paint houses or businesspeople to conduct business?

This is not a partisan issue. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson on his web page says that the second pillar of conservative governance is “limited government” and that government “is more efficient and less corrupt when it is limited in its size and scope.” Senate Bill One is full of unfunded mandates that create vast amounts of unnecessary bureaucracy to force institutions to do what they already are doing. This would waste millions of taxpayer dollars.

Senate Bill One threatens academic freedom. The language is vague and could easily be weaponized against almost any professor trying to effectively teach students. Our simply discussing religion, politics, race, gender, economics, or even aesthetics could be seen by some students as pushing a “social, political, or religious point of view.” Even though we allow free expression on these topics, a very small minority of students and parents on both the left and the right feel these issues should not be discussed. This bill creates a tattletale culture, empowering this small minority to shut down open, thoughtful discussion that benefits the vast majority of students.

Speaker Johnson, as part of his “limited government” point, writes, “legitimate government operates only by the consent of the governed.” When SB1 was introduced in the Ohio

Senate, there were 14 witness testimonies in favor, most of whom are nationally known rightwing figures. A friend of mine joked that they had to be flown into Ohio to testify. There were, on the other hand, over 1000 opposing witness testimonies from Ohio citizens. In what world is a bill opposed by over 98% of testifiers “the consent of the governed”? Would any of you consider it an electoral victory to be voted in by 1.4% of your district? Ohio citizens have loudly voiced that they do not want this bill to pass.

Citizens’ concerns—98.6% of testimonies, which Senator Cirino dismisses as “irrelevant”—are rooted in this bill’s completely undermining education in Ohio. The wasteful micromanaging of faculty and institutions would lead to a stifling of learning and productive discussion. The bill effectively eliminates tenure. The current system is working, and faculty are already let go if they are not doing their jobs. However, under the bill, faculty could be fired for any reason, legitimate or not. The bill disempowers and potentially eliminates unions, which Senator Cirino has called a “third party” in negotiations. Anyone who has been a part of a union understands that the union IS the employees, not a third party.

The passage of Senate Bill One would make Ohio a national laughingstock and lead to the same issues that occurred in Florida after similar bills were passed, or possibly worse. *The Guardian* reported in July 2023 that “Ron DeSantis’s slew of laws attacking teaching of race and gender issues sees state’s colleges struggle to fill faculty posts.” This bill will lead to drastic enrollment drops, costing the state tuition dollars and leading to our most promising young students and workers fleeing the state for colleges that don’t have to deal with these kinds of bills. I am already aware of dozens of students who’ve changed their plans to apply to Ohio universities and instead are only applying out of state simply based on the potential that this bill could pass.

For the sake of our tax paying citizens and our education system, please reject Senate Bill One, arguably the most reviled bill ever to be introduced in the state of Ohio.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Morgenstein