

Testimony Against SB1 for the Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

I had the unique privilege of attending this committee's meeting and hearing Cirino's testimony of Senate Bill 1 on March 4, 2025. The committee's questions were both informed and respectful, which I found reassuring. This was not only my first time in the basement of the Capitol building and a live audience of a government proceeding but also as a direct witness to the House's propensity toward listening and acting upon our concerns as citizens. Unfortunately, this moment juxtaposed Cirino's procedural, literal, and figurative position of his back turned to us while spouting fallacious rhetoric. Among other duplicitous moves, Cirino reinforced the bill's intention of requiring "diversity of thought." The bill mentions "intellectual diversity," but not the precise term "diversity of thought."

One of the most notable differences between the version under review and the one from 2023-2024 is the explicit definition and usage of "intellectual diversity." While the consistency of terminology like this might seem minor, it illustrates one instance in which committee members struggled with the bill's language. As one person asked earnestly, how can "diversity of thought" happen without a diverse academic community? Cirino and numerous others have pointed out that this bill opposes programs and scholarships in the name of diversity. Cirino falsely separated diversity of thought from people, aiming solely at eliminating discrimination. Further, he claimed that the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published evidence of liberal indoctrination and did not name a single author or article title. Cirino refused to provide necessary backing, even after repeated requests from a committee member sitting directly before him. He eventually said the committee should do their own research. Near the end of the discussion, when asked about amending the bill, he blamed the committee for a year-long delay, urging immediate approval regardless of the bill's length and scope. Along with broader implications for K-12 education, the 2023-2024 bill proposed virtually removing a requirement for remediation after high school. I understand how that, besides other things, would give multiple committee members pause.

Early in the March 4 hearing, questions turned to limitations on higher education instructors. The inquiry centered on the bill's vagueness regarding "controversial issues" and its potential impact on curriculum control. Cirino repeatedly insisted that anything could be brought into the classroom, including "crazy ideas." Those are his words, not mine. The words "misinformation" and "disinformation" never entered the conversation, so I feel the need to mention that those terms can be technically defined as "crazy ideas." The bill's language contradicts Cirino's claims since it states that instructors must not prohibit students from "expressing intellectual diversity." If "diversity of thought" includes "crazy ideas," the logical assumption is that teachers should allow students to espouse misinformation and disinformation. Most agree that distinguishing facts from "crazy ideas" is foundational to critical thinking. Ohio's general education model outlines outcomes of this nature. In this way, Senate Bill 1 is antithetical to those outcomes; if students can enter the workforce or graduate-level studies without ever being able to differentiate opinion and fiction from fact, are they truly educated? If students enter college with little to no ability to draw logical conclusions, should faculty not help them? Opining is one thing, but entertaining "crazy ideas" is another, and the bill's intent draws a false equivalency between the two. A proposal like this in a required general education course would likely fail and demand revision—an action Cirino is unwilling to take. I have faith that you recognize this bill's dangers and will vote against it. Please prove me right.