

Testimony of Austin McCabe Juhnke, PhD  
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 Austin McCabe Juhnke and I am a professor of Musicology at Ohio State University, where I have taught for 6 years. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to House Bill 6.

H.B. 6 claims to serve the purpose of ensuring a “means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth” (578-80). This sentiment is wonderful in concept, but in reality this bill would have the opposite effect.

H.B. 6 specifically prevents educators from “indoctrinating” (675) students with regard to “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy” (600-1). The authors of the bill identify several specific examples of topics they believe **are** subjects of political controversy. Yet I ask the bill’s authors: which topics could **not** be considered controversial under the terms of this bill?

In some circles, for example, the idea that the Earth is spherical in shape is a matter of political controversy, even though it is a physical fact of our existence. Under this bill, an educator *could* be held accountable for “indoctrinating” students about the shape of the planet. Proponents of the bill may claim that this would never happen—and perhaps they would be right. But they couldn’t honestly tell you that it would not be *possible*. Controversy is easily manufactured, and the language of the bill is so vague that it leaves open a clear pathway for eliminating virtually any professor for simply educating students in their field of expertise.

The bill will not help students come to their own informed conclusions about controversial topics. Instead, the result of H.B. 6 will be an environment in which educators are afraid of teaching, afraid of being targeted by their institution and the state government leaving students without the meaningful tools they want for engaging with the realities of our world.

This is a bad bill for freedom of thought in Ohio, and must be rejected by anyone who cares about open discourse at our universities.