

Testimony of Paul Hurley
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:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Paul Hurley, and I am an Associate Professor at Kent State University. I do not represent Kent State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1, which, if passed, would significantly harm the higher education system in Ohio.

I have been teaching for 10 years, including the past 7 years here in Ohio. My job as a theater teacher has always been to help my students become better actors and thinkers, providing them with the tools and techniques to analyze plays, develop characters, and to express themselves more freely. This bill, however, threatens to limit my ability to do just that. I'm aware that the bill's proponents may believe it will promote independent thinking in the classroom, but from my experience working with students, I can confidently say it will do the opposite. Rather than fostering free thought, it will impose unnecessary restrictions on how we teach and how students learn.

In the play *Hamlet*, the title character asks the actors to "hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." This is the essence of great art (and impactful teaching) – it reflects the world around us, showing it in all its complexities. In many parts of world, artists face imprisonment for telling certain stories. Here in the United States, we are so fortunate to have the ability to freely explore and express challenging ideas through art. Unfortunately, this bill would undermine the ability of educators to help students explore these stories and complexities.

If this bill is passed, the state of Ohio risks losing talented students to other states where they can receive an education that fosters independent thought. Faculty members, too, will likely consider leaving the state. This bill places arbitrary restrictions on faculty hiring and limits tenure protections. For all of these reasons, this bill will most certainly weaken Ohio's ability to attract top-tier educators and students. This shift could weaken Ohio's workforce and, in the long run, harm the state's economic development.

I am proud of the work we are doing in Ohio's classrooms, and I am confident that we do not need government interference to ensure our students succeed. The success of Ohio's higher education system depends on intellectual freedom, not political mandates. I would like to personally invite each of you to visit my classroom. You will see firsthand the extraordinary work my students are doing, and I believe you will understand just how important it is for them to have the freedom to explore ideas without unnecessary restrictions.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill in the interest of our students, our institutions, and the future of Ohio's workforce.

Sincerely,
Paul Hurley