

Testimony of Jamie Lyn Smith, MFA, tenured English Language Arts Teacher (7-12) and Writer

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 Jamie Lyn Smith and I am a former teacher and professor, with over 20 years experience teaching high school, community college, and post-secondary students. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen who is deeply alarmed by the content of SB1 and its potential to strip students and faculty at public college of the right to freedom of speech, expression, and ideology. College students are adults. They do not need to be coddled and told what they can and cannot discuss because someone, somewhere thinks it is “controversial.” What is the point of education-- something that the Buckeye State prides itself on, with good reason-- if not to explore and discuss the most urgent and pressing matters of our time? What is the point of education, if not to engage students in grappling with problems so that they can research, study, and explore solutions? This bill is absurd, and purports to turn every student in every classroom into a tender little snowflake whose feelings mustn't be hurt, whose ideas mustn't be challenged, and defangs the transformative power of education. The bill also exerts illegal and unconstitutional limits on free speech. It has long been held that free speech does not end at the classroom door; intellectual freedom is the bedrock of our storied and respected academic institutions. How will Ohio continue to attract talented faculty when the state legislature is meddling in the content of their courses? That's censorship, pure and simple, and Ohioans will pay the price when researchers and scholars decline jobs, or take their talents out of state. No American should be subject to a law that muzzles free expression, and frankly it is a disgrace that the Ohio legislature is even considering something this overtly Orwellian and repressive. This reeks of authoritarianism. Students and faculty aren't babies: they can listen to many perspectives of an issue, read what they want, discuss “controversial” issues inside and outside class, and make up their own minds without the state legislature wagging a prurient finger and putting a gag order on these topics. I urge you to vote NO on SB1. Protect and preserve the freedom that makes America great, and for the love of all that is holy and sacred in our U.S. Constitution, let professors and students continue to learn and teach in freedom so that they can exercise the critical thinking skills and essential scholarly rigor that have long distinguished Ohio as a leader in education.