

Testimony of Everson Brooks
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 9, 2025

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and members of the Higher Education Committee.

My name is Everson Brooks, and I am testifying as a private citizen, though I am currently involved in my university studies. I am also a queer person, surrounded by many others both like and unlike myself, here in school, and it is through both these perspectives as an individual and a group that I am in firm opposition to the SB 1 bill because of its obvious vocality against promoting the discussion of such “controversial topics” as the very identities of many Ohioan students.

These controversial topics as given by the bill are left intentionally vague, meaning that anything remotely tied to social and “political controversy” must be described nonspecifically so as to not sway students towards any particular conclusion, which promotes confusion and lack of intelligence, and is simply impossible even among scientific studies. My anthropology teacher would no longer be able to even suggest to me that humans and great apes stem from some far off common ancestor, despite the fact that innumerable evidence proved this claim nearly two hundred years ago, all for fear that one unqualified person perusing our university website has nothing better to do than say otherwise.

Additionally, I think this bill is completely contradictory of itself, attempting to push “intellectual diversity” while gutting DEI initiatives (wouldn’t intellectual diversity compliance fall under DEI?) and promoting the censorship of student voices, who are now unable to learn about such crucial issues such as racism, foreign policy, and even climate. If American Civic Literacy becomes a required course for every school’s roster, how can we effectively learn why the Emancipation Proclamation, or the Letter From Birmingham Jail are so crucial in American history if we cannot learn about the proliferation of American racism? I believe this idea of allowing students to “reach their own conclusions” seeks to promote confusion and lack of awareness about current socio-political issues, and suggests that universities are attempting to indoctrinate their students when I have always known my institutions to allow their students to have their own opinions, just supported by the curriculum’s facts: this would no longer be possible if we cannot discuss these topics at all.

This censorship does not end at student voices. My professors under this bill would no longer be able to strike in order to fight unfairness on campus, meaning that this bill quells the right of protest as soon as it is put into place, suggesting to me that the bill’s proponents know this controversial bill is deeply unpopular, and if you’re unaware of the numbers it very much is. Over 830 people submitted testimony in opposition to the

bill as it passed out of the Senate, while a measly 14 letters appeared in favor. I'd like to remind our Representatives here that in your very job titles, you are meant to reflect and represent the voices of the Ohioan people. Clearly this legislation is unwanted, and clearly some of our government is self interested enough to ignore what they are here to do. I urge you to consider whether you want to be part of that group.

I'm pursuing a fine arts degree. Through my historical studies I have discovered that art, always in one way or another, is made in response to the culture in which it is created; whether that be some common subject matter, as in still lifes; material, determined by the surroundings; or on a deeply personal level in which case the artist imbues their work with some form of reaction to their society. I think immediately of the works of Felix Gonzales-Torres, who famously made deeply emotional sculptures symbolic of the destruction and loss of loved ones as the AIDS epidemic left countless lives wasting away, all because our government did not care enough to seek a cure for the disease since those most affected by it were homosexual. I mention this to say that identity in one form or another is intrinsic to all daily life, and that uncomfortable topics are just as all encompassing. You cannot pursue an education, and you cannot live among others, without recognizing and embracing these two facts.

I myself am of the belief that to never want to learn, and to feel change, or to seek new and diverse people, with thoughts like and unlike one's own, however uncomfortable those conversations may be, is the most controversial and harmful stance that one may take.