

Testimony of Alex Wolf-Root, 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 Alex Wolf-Root, and I am a Senior Lecturer of Philosophy at The Ohio State University. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

As an instructor and scholar, I am deeply committed to rigorous academic inquiry, very much including inquiry that pushes back against generally accepted societal views. I regularly stress on my syllabi that “we are often going to be critical of the status quo [...] not because the status quo is necessarily wrong, but rather because only through such questioning can we reasonably hope to move closer to the truth.” I myself have some deeply held views that are poorly represented on campus, a couple to the point of being viewed as ridiculous by the majority. Despite all that, I fear that this big government overreach that is SB 1 will undermine, rather than support, the noble goal of expanding rigorous academic inquiry.

While there’s much wrong with this proposed governmental power grab, I want to focus on the idea of pushing political viewpoints. While supposedly in opposition to this, SB 1 is really an attempt by the government to promote governmentally preferred views on some highly contentious issues. The bill itself is in opposition to the restriction from Section 3345.0217 (B) (4) on attempting “to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious point of view” by restricting certain topics – topics that are socially, politically, and religiously charged – as acceptable for academic inquiry. Despite that claimed noble goal, the bill also explicitly states certain points of view that the government of Ohio deems acceptable in 3345.0217 (B) (6). I don’t know about you, but the government telling me what I can’t discuss and what I can promote sounds like the government attempting to indoctrinate certain social, political, and possibly religious views.

This governmental overreach into rigorous academic inquiry is especially worrisome once we see the vagueness of what will be acceptable or not. Section 3345.0217 (B) notes that some restrictions “do not apply to the exercise of professional judgement about whether to endorse the consensus or foundational beliefs of an academic discipline, unless the exercise is misused...” I don’t know about you, but it seems pretty worrisome to me to allow the government to pass a law saying that government bureaucrats – or even worse partisan politicians – get to determine if the person with the academic expertise to teach the course can share their expertise about what is the relevant consensus or foundational beliefs in their area of expertise. Some might even say it sounds down right un-American; though to be

clear, if others want to discuss if this is better understood as American as can be, well I would certainly allow them the freedom of expression to do so.

Beyond whatever others concerns others might well have with this governmental power grab, it simply undermines the claimed goal of promoting robust academic inquiry about a wide range of issues. I strongly agree with this claimed goal and the need to question many things that many in society find problematic to question, but this bill does not do that.

If you want big government to pressure students and faculty to restrict ideas and expression, then SB 1 is for you. If you actually want to promote robust free academic inquiry, then SB 1 must be defeated.

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1. Thank you for your time.