

March 9, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce & Higher Education Committee,

My name is Ashlee Brand. I am submitting this opposition testimony as a private citizen and not as a representative of Cuyahoga Community College. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

SB1 is bad for Ohio; it negatively impacts learning conditions that directly impact students, threatens the integrity and quality of educational institutions in our state, attacks educator expertise regarding curriculum, and weakens the landscape for the educational future of citizens by harming the pathway to careers. It will have a **negative impact on the economic stability of the state** by driving our neighbors elsewhere for their educational experiences.

I have been fortunate to teach in Ohio's higher education system for almost two decades. In these times, I've worked with thousands of students who sought to earn certificates, degrees, and to achieve personal and professional goals. My students come from all backgrounds and lived experiences, but one thing they have in common is the goal of completing their degrees and obtaining employment that will provide a wage that allows them to support themselves and their families.

Please hear the voices and experiences of those who work directly with students daily. Our classrooms are spaces where students develop critical thinking skills, learn to engage with diverse perspectives, and prepare for the complex challenges they'll face in their careers. SB1 threatens these fundamental aspects of education by creating an environment of fear and restriction that will diminish the quality of education we can provide.

In my multiple decades of teaching, I've witnessed countless moments where students' lives were transformed through open dialogue and engagement with challenging ideas. Of note is that these ideas were not always my own, as the role of an educator is to support students in learning to find their own voice—not false accusations of indoctrination perpetuated by those attacking education in our state. My students have gone on to become nurses, doctors, IT professionals, business leaders, community advocates, and even, teachers. They succeed because we provide an education that prepares them for the “real world,” a world that requires the ability to think critically, engage with different perspectives, and navigate complex social and professional environments.

SB1 would severely limit our ability to prepare students for these realities. By restricting discussions and limiting academic freedom, we risk graduating students who are unprepared for the workforce they'll enter. Our local employers rely on us to produce graduates who can work effectively in teams of difference, think critically about complex problems, *and* adapt to changing circumstances. This bill would hamper our ability to deliver on these essential workforce development needs.

Moreover, this legislation would create a chilling effect in our classrooms, where educators might self-censor out of fear of punishment, and students might hesitate to engage in meaningful discussions about real-world issues that affect their lives and future careers. This is particularly concerning at a community college, where our mission is deeply rooted in serving our local community and preparing students for immediate entry into the workforce.

The economic implications for Ohio are serious. Many of my students choose to study in Ohio because of our reputation for quality education. If we compromise this quality through restrictive legislation, we risk losing these students to other states. This *exodus* would not only affect our educational institutions but would have ripple effects throughout our economy as we lose future skilled workers and professionals.

I urge you to consider the real-world implications of this bill on:

- Student preparation for the workforce
- Ohio's ability to attract and retain talent
- The quality of education we can provide
- Our state's economic competitiveness
- The future of our higher education system

As someone who has dedicated their career to education in Ohio, I ask you to oppose SB1 and its companion bill HB6 and instead support policies that strengthen our ability to prepare students for success in their careers and lives. Our students deserve an education that equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in today's world. They—and our educational system and state—deserve better than this bill.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashlee Brand