

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sara Accettura. I am a former educator, a merit badge counselor for Lake Erie Council in Ohio, an active community member, and most importantly, a mother of a current student at an Ohio university. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

This bill has a number of concerning elements, but what worries me the most is the elimination of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. It is concerning that our freedom of speech would be limited in a way to be against diverse perspectives, because diversity is what actually makes America great. Including all Americans and their perspectives is not a radical concept. It is integral for a functional democracy. As a voter, I want my government to represent all of the people of this country.

In addition, Ohio Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) poses significant risks to both higher education and the broader state economy. At its core, the bill would limit academic freedom by restricting the teaching of what it deems “controversial” topics, such as climate change, which are not innately controversial, but instead backed by science. By placing a substantial burden on universities to adhere to strict new regulations on course syllabi, faculty evaluations, and intellectual diversity, the bill threatens to stifle open academic discourse. The measure would also undercut workers' rights by limiting meaningful tenure protections, allowing for arbitrary retrenchment of faculty, and preventing collective bargaining on key issues like workload and tenure. These changes would likely lead to the loss of top-tier professors and make Ohio's institutions less competitive, possibly driving students and faculty to other states with stronger protections for academic freedom.

Furthermore, SB 1 is expected to harm Ohio's economy by reducing the state's attractiveness to students, faculty, and businesses. The bill's bans on academic partnerships, including with China, and its restrictions on faculty and staff ideological expression would likely deter international collaboration, research funding, and student enrollment. With the elimination of certain academic programs and forced budget cuts, the state could lose valuable intellectual capital and innovation that universities contribute to the workforce. As a result, Ohio could experience a decline in tourism dollars, tuition revenue, and job opportunities, further exacerbating economic challenges. This legislation not only threatens the quality and accessibility of education but also undermines the state's future prosperity by curtailing academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful and discriminatory bill that will limit our freedom of speech.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.