

Testimony of Christopher Leger
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 Christopher Leger. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the History Department at The Ohio State University (OSU). I do not represent The Ohio State University and am submitting my testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I moved here to Columbus, OH from Dallas, TX to pursue a doctorate at The Ohio State University starting in 2022. I left my work as an educator in public schooling to move my teaching to the university setting and branch towards students from all walks of life. Part of the reason I came to Ohio was the greater degree of academic freedom afforded by state laws that were not influenced by partisan cultural divides in the legislature. The current measures proposed in SB1 are a direct blow to the quality of education our students deserve, despite Mr. Cirino's assertion that the "core value" of this bill is that "students come first." I also believe it is abhorrent that Mr. Cirino calls the significant outcry of this bill "irrelevant", the students and workers that make higher education happen are largely unified in opposition to this attack on freedom of speech and intellectual expression. Ohio must be better if it wants to be respected in our changing intellectual landscape.

When anyone on campus can report educators for violating the spirit of intellectual diversity and indoctrinating students by forcing a stance on a controversial subject, it pushes instructors to teach around student expectations. SB1's aims to limit endorsement or opposition to controversial subjects means that instructors should either entirely avoid alternative viewpoints from mainstream consensus or platform truly dangerous ideas such as antisemitism, racism, or domestic terrorism as being equally valid to democracy, rule of law, and civic participation.

With SB1, publicly available syllabi, mutual surveillance, and a commitment to an extremist form of "neutrality" means that once more I and my fellow educators will have to contend with harassment by bad-faith actors who are pushing for a singular ideological vision, rather than a place of intellectual diversity. Texas already makes syllabi accessible to the public in a similar vein to SB1 through the 2009 HB2504. It has resulted in professors constantly second-guessing what materials they can assign or discuss without a deluge of emails from random people and organizations not even taking their classes. Targeted harassment campaigns have come after faculty for their expressed gender, research, work history, nationality, sexual orientation, and private views on social media. If we are interested in protecting academic faculty, staff,

instructors, and graduate students as workers that represent values of the state of Ohio, then legislation should not endanger them for serving their community.

By passing SB1, Ohio makes a statement to not only students in our state, but to educators, professionals, and learners all over the world. Diversity of thought, origin, and expression are not only discouraged, but are active liabilities to anybody who chooses to participate in higher education in the state of Ohio. Prohibiting striking, threatening funding, and institutionalizing easily weaponized reporting undermines the entire state's ability to recruit new talent and further alienates those who have chosen to make their home here.

Sincerely,
Christopher Leger
PhD Candidate, Department of History
The Ohio State University