

Testimony of Jwayyed Jwayyed
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 Jwayyed Jwayyed and I am the Legal Director of the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, CAIR- Ohio, the nation's leading Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

CAIR is dedicated to promoting justice, protecting civil rights, and ensuring equality for all Ohioans and we are deeply concerned that SB 1 creates an unprecedented framework for state overreach in higher education.

This bill threatens to stifle open dialogue, suppress marginalized voices, and undermine the very principles that make Ohio's universities spaces for intellectual growth and civic engagement.

This legislation is vague and overbroad in its requirements for universities to remain "neutral."

By mandating state-approved civics course, SB 1 paves the way for government intervention in education, historical revisionism, and ideological control over course content. if enacted, SB 1 will

- take away courses on the Holocaust, Rwandan genocide, the Japanese encampments, or even the major World Wars.
- It would force universities to censor courses on African American History, taking out the words: "racism," "imperialism," and "colonization" from course material.
- Could you imagine your children going to college and their studies are void of any difference, open engagement or any curiosity?
 - Not being able to study liberal vs conservative views, comparative religion or literature. Anything that requires a student to ... think.
 - In *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* (1957), the Supreme Court held that academic freedom is a "special concern of the First Amendment." Limiting debates and discussions around social and political issues would run contrary to this long-standing principle.
- SB 1 will raise other constitutional concerns:
- Government-Imposed Restrictions on Free Speech

- SB 1 seeks to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs within Ohio's public universities.
- The dismantling of such programs could limit resources, funding, and support systems for Muslims, Christians, Jewish students alike, impacting their ability to access student organizations and mentorship programs such as MSA and many other organizations.
- Not only does SB1 dismantle the DEI programs but it also silences student advocacy by limiting the ability for students to protest and organize, both of which are fundamental to democracy.
- Wrong Level of Scrutiny
 - In order for the State of Ohio to restrict free speech in a public setting like a university, courts generally apply strict scrutiny to determine whether the law is constitutional.
 - This means the government must show that the law serves a compelling governmental interest, and that the restriction is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest.
 - In this case, the government's interest in "neutrality" is not a compelling enough reason to limit speech and academic freedom, especially since universities already have mechanisms to ensure balanced and respectful discourse. Also, the law is likely not narrowly tailored, as it seems to broadly limit all discourse on social and political issues, regardless of how the discussions might contribute to the educational environment.
- Viewpoint Discrimination
 - SB 1, if enacted, could lead to viewpoint discrimination in Ohio.
 - By requiring universities to avoid certain social and political issues, it will unfairly target viewpoints, particularly those advocating for
 - social justice: Like Black lives matter, gender and women's rights,
 - civil rights- like racial profiling or excessive force cases or
 - political reform- like discussing whether or not the US should Annex our friends to the north in Canada.
 - Forcing universities to remain neutral suppresses marginalized or progressive perspectives, making it harder for these voices to be heard. This type of discrimination, even under the claim of neutrality, is unconstitutional.

Chairman and Members of the higher education committee, I thank you for your time today and I hope that you will consider these concerns and the detrimental effects that it will have on our community and future education.