

Testimony of Robyn White, M.A. Sociology
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 9, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Robyn White, and I am a professor of Sociology at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for 19 years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen to explain how detrimental SB1 would be for higher education in our state.

I have been teaching sociology in higher education since 2001 and have seen just how much benefit higher education can have for my students. It exposes students to new ways of thinking, encourages them to find truth in the midst of neverending opinions disguised as truth, and helps them to understand themselves in ways they have never been able to do before. As a clear example, I have had students in a current Social Problems course who have elected to review this proposed bill and come to their own conclusions about this bill. I encouraged them to find support for and opposition to the bill and asked them to come to their own conclusions about it. With no prompting from me, every single student in that course opposed the bill. Some of their reasons include the following:

- By eliminating all diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, students who have identities that have traditionally been supported by those programs feel as if they are being erased. This includes non-white students, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and students with disabilities.
- The provision that states that students should reach their own conclusions about “controversial” topics would essentially encourage faculty to not cover those topics at all and would be problematic when we have to give equal weight to all viewpoints, including those that have no scientific backing. For example, I had a student recently state that the Klu Klux Klan no longer exists, despite ample evidence that the group is alive and well. Would I have to give equal weight to their “viewpoint” as I would for actual factual statements? Additionally, although this bill outlines examples of “controversial” topics, surely this would need to change as political climates change. How would we keep track of what is and what is not considered a controversial topic? Who gets to make those decisions?
- By not allowing faculty the ability to strike, you are essentially creating an inability for faculty to stand up not only for themselves, but also making it nearly impossible to stand up for our students as well. Higher education is a partnership among all involved parties and harming one harms us all.

In short, SB1 will harm higher education in the state of Ohio. I've already spoken to students and faculty who are already looking to move out of Ohio if this legislation passes. This will not only result in a brain drain in our state, but will also have significant negative economic impacts as we lose some of the brightest minds in our state. It seems to me the main goal of this legislation is to encourage the free thought and exchange of ideas within higher education. The way the bill is written, though, seems to do this by discriminating against a significant portion of the population. This is not the way to go and will not showcase our state as a leader in education or innovation.

Thank you all for your consideration of this testimony. I appreciate you taking the time to read and consider this view of the legislation.

Robyn White, M.A. Sociology