

Testimony of Sabrina Durso

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Representative Tom Young, Chair

March 11, 2025

Good Morning. Thank you Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sabrina Durso, and I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1. While I testify today as a private citizen, I am here to share survey results regarding SB1, which were collected by the Council of Graduate Students at The Ohio State University.

In my role as President of the Council of Graduate Students, I have heard grave concerns from *our* constituents that will benefit you as you make your decisions regarding SB1. In a survey distributed to all 11,000+ graduate students by CGS, 788 students reported their thoughts on SB1.

Representatives, you've made clear that those of you in support of SB1 believe students need protection from indoctrination by faculty and staff regarding social, political, or religious beliefs. However, without being able to discuss topics that SB1 defines as "controversial beliefs or policies," the survey respondents feel SB1 would create an environment of self-censorship and suppress open academic inquiry between students and their instructors. It is this rigorous, open academic inquiry that draws the brightest from Ohio and beyond to our institutions of public education and helps make our state a desirable place to learn, work, and live.

It is important to note that recent restrictions against diversity, equity, and inclusion, like those that might apply to SB1, are already negatively impacting graduate students at The Ohio State. Due to the removal of all DEI training, some graduate students have been told by their

advisors that they can no longer research certain topics due to possible future research restrictions regarding SB1, despite any presence of this directive in the bill. Additionally, many respondents emphasized the importance of already-impacted DEI initiatives that helped those from low-income backgrounds eventually become graduate students, like the Morrill Scholarship and Young Scholars Program. Respondents also expressed concerns on how future restrictions on DEI will impact various graduate programs in fields such as education, social work, biodiversity, and more.

Currently, at Ohio State, 80% of the respondents feel they can pursue their research questions regardless of political and ideological content, and 69% feel they can engage with a wide range of student questions and concerns openly as an instructor. While the majority of the respondents feel that academic freedom is secure *now*, many feel threatened by SB1. If SB1 were to pass, only 12% of the respondents feel they could continue to pursue the research they originally came to OSU to complete, and only 7% feel they could fully engage with a wide range of their students' questions as undergraduate instructors. While many graduate students traditionally contribute to Ohio's economy after graduation, the possibility of SB1 has many prepared to leave Ohio's institutions for various concerns, including how the bill's possible effects on higher education might affect the market value of their degree.

If you value recruiting and retaining top talent to ensure our status as a state where researchers and educators of the highest caliber come to learn and educate, please vote NO on Senate Bill 1. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. I am happy to take any questions you may have.