

Testimony of Ilona Boehm-O'Connor

March 9, 2025

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 Ilona Boehm-O'Connor, and I am here to urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

I am a freshman majoring in History and Social Studies Education at Miami University. I am from Alexandria, Virginia, about 20 minutes outside of DC. I decided to attend Miami as an out-of-state student due to the well-regarded Department of Education, one that centers on culturally relevant, inclusive, and diverse learning styles, and because of the aid that Miami generously provided for me.

I am lucky enough to come from an area and a family where education and diverse backgrounds are seen as essential to our success. However, during my first semester at Miami, I took an education class where many students went to high schools, and 90% or more of the students were white. Learning how to be a culturally relevant teacher, a practice that has been proven to be beneficial and would help students from ALL backgrounds, including impoverished students, of minority backgrounds, disabled, or immigrants, was a new experience for them, and one that they would never have learned about if it had not been for this class. Passing SB 1 would make learning this information much harder, and would have catastrophic effects on primary and secondary education.

Since attending Miami, I have learned that many programs and scholarships are intended to keep Ohio students in the state. The Ohio Department of Higher Education's website reads

that “It is paramount that Ohio also competes to attract and retain a well-educated workforce” about the Governor’s Merit Scholarship. Passing SB 1 would be a catalyst for a brain drain of students and professors. Losing these students and professors would only harm Ohioans- Miami University is the largest employer in Butler County, and students transferring out of your schools would lead to residents losing their jobs and businesses that rely on college students, including out-of-state students.

Finally, SB 1 is an attempt to tear apart higher education. This is a tactic that has historically been used by fascist leaders and dictators to assert control over a nation and is a violation of free speech and a threat to our democracy. Requiring neutrality, as SB 1 would, is dangerous, and it will prevent individuals from learning from the past to do better in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. I ask you to take my testimony to heart and vote NO on this bill before it harms the education of Ohioans.