

Written Testimony  
Joan Spoerl  
SB 1  
March 10, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce & Higher Education Committee,

My name is Joan Spoerl and I reside in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. I am a former teacher, an early childhood educator and parent of a college sophomore (studying in Massachusetts).

As it is written, this proposed legislation is unnecessary and unhelpful. If you want to promote civil dialogue and an educated citizenry, banning the teaching and discussion of certain topics is not the American way to achieve this goal. I would posit that using such legislation that incorporates fear, threats and intimidation to suppress free speech and inquiry, and the discussion of history is anti-democratic and in direct opposition to the founding principles of our republic.

As a graduate of The College of the University of Chicago, I suggest another way. Model civil dialogue about the issues that you find significant and challenging. Consider promoting the University of Chicago's Freedom of Expression guidelines (attached). As stated on the website, "An education that fosters free expression empowers students to engage with challenging ideas – in college and throughout their lives." Another relevant quote from George W. Beedle at his 1961 University of Chicago Inaugural Address in 1961: "One cannot search for truth with a closed mind, or without the right to question or doubt at every step. Any injunction to close the mind, to restrict one's beliefs arbitrarily, or to accept on authority without doubt, violates the concept of freedom of the mind."

And a relevant quote from Thomas Jefferson, part of which is etched into the walls of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C.: "**... laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.**" - Jefferson to H. Tompkinson (AKA Samuel Kercheval), July 12, 1816

As I've aged, many assumptions I once had have since been challenged and upended by living and working in integrated environments, and by bringing an open heart and mind with me wherever I go. Thank goodness. My life is richer for it. Yours and those of other Ohioans can be too if you open your hearts and minds and strive to live up to the ideals upon which our country was founded.

One experience that opened my heart, mind and eyes was my own family's deep involvement in promoting peace and reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland through the Ulster Project (such as the one that was implemented in Massillon, Ohio). Through that work, we saw how biases and misinformation, perpetuated for centuries, caused unnecessary division and strife. We saw how when people get to know one another, one on one, biases break down, the

truth is revealed, and healing occurs. This is what I wish for the citizens of Ohio. This legislation will not allow for such a process in our institutions of higher education.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unnecessary, anti-democratic and unpatriotic bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony.