

Kristen Oganowski
918 Chelsea Ave.
Columbus, OH 43209
Koganowski@gmail.com
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Dear Committee Members:

I am writing for myself and not on behalf of my employer or union. As a concerned citizen of the State of Ohio, college faculty member, and member of the Columbus State Education Association, I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 (SB1).

Any effective problem-solver should ask themselves the following questions: 1) What problem am I trying to solve? 2) How can I prevent my solutions from creating even more problems? Distinguished Committee Members, I fear that Senate Bill 1 lacks a clear articulation of the problem that it is trying to solve. I also fear that it fails to adequately anticipate, prevent, and respond to the myriad problems that it will create.

For one, this legislation risks undermining educational meritocracy. More specifically, it risks undermining meritocratic ideals within the classroom. For instance, if a faculty member's job security depends so heavily upon the results of student evaluations, they may be tempted to inflate students' grades, diminish the rigor of their coursework, and cater their teaching to students' ideologies so that students don't retaliate with negative evaluations. I can scarcely think of anyone, faculty or otherwise, who would welcome these results.

In addition, this legislation risks undermining educational liberty. One such example appears in the American civic literacy course requirement: a course that, on its surface, is not at all objectionable. In fact, as it is briefly described in the bill, this course includes many texts that regularly appear on higher education course syllabi ranging from History to Political Science to Philosophy to Economics. However, if this course gets squeezed into the already-stretched requirements for students' degree programs, it risks robbing those students of the liberty to choose how they want to satisfy those requirements. A nursing student who might opt for an Ethics class, a business student who might opt for a psychology course, or even a history enthusiast who would love to learn more about the Ancient Greek and Roman history or John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and their influence on the framers of the U.S. Constitution: they all may need to forego these options and take the American civic literacy course instead.

The consequences begin to look like a tax, the burden of which will be placed on students and their families. Students who can afford it will be able to take additional electives that promote their educational liberty. But not all students and families can afford this option. They will be left with even fewer options to choose the courses that align with their career and personal goals.

Paradoxically, this legislation also undermines efforts to root out bias. For example, think of a faculty member whose bias leads them to the unfounded presumption that people with an Appalachian accent are less intelligent, less capable than their peers. Sadly, this bias is reinforced by television, film, and other media trying to code certain characters as “stupid” by relying on hillbilly tropes and stereotypes. A truly equitable and inclusive workplace would aim to challenge these and other biases *before* faculty are even in the classroom. This is what diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings and implicit bias trainings are for. And yet this legislation would weaken an institution’s ability to root out these biases by prohibiting these orientations and trainings and any new trainings that “serve the same or similar purposes, or that [use] the same or similar means.”

Lastly, this legislation will have a chilling effect on organized labor in higher education. In fact, the language of this legislation should be worrisome for all other unions and workers in the state of Ohio, many of whom are your constituents: teachers in K-12 systems, firefighters, health care workers, auto workers and more. The solidarity shared across all unions means that you risk losing the support of these constituents. As we all know, a harm to one union is a harm to all.

So, is this legislation a good solution? To reiterate, it’s a solution that risks creating even more problems for meritocracy, educational liberty, and bias-prevention. Perhaps even more troubling for you and *all* your constituents, it also creates problems for organized labor.

And as the voters of Ohio have shown you time and again, *that* is a huge problem.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further and hope you will oppose Senate Bill 1 and the harms it will create for faculty, students, and the ideals that many of us share, despite our differences.

Sincerely,

Kristen Oganowski
Columbus State Community College
Columbus State Education Association