

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 1

Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Julia Parrey, and I am a law student at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. As a student leader, student employee of the University, graduate of the University of Cincinnati in Political Science and Neuroscience, and current JD candidate, I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 because it threatens the quality and integrity of the entire higher education system in Ohio—education that has shaped and enriched my academic journey and career path.

Originally from Pennsylvania, I was drawn to Ohio by educational opportunities that allowed me to study multiple subjects that I was passionate about. I chose to stay in Ohio for law school because of the University of Cincinnati's strong commitment to social justice and equitable education, and because of the love I developed for the University and the city. This environment has been critical in preparing me to become an advocate for justice and fairness.

However, Senate Bill 1 undermines these very values by limiting academic freedom, restricting discussions on crucial societal issues, and dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that support students from all backgrounds.

As someone who has experienced the benefits of Ohio's robust higher education system, I worry that this bill will drive away students and faculty who seek an environment that fosters open inquiry and inclusive learning. Instead of bettering Ohio into a leader in education, Senate Bill 1 risks turning it into a place where intellectual exploration is stifled and where students—particularly those from marginalized communities—feel unwelcome and uninvited. An institution which stifles the speech of its professors by prohibiting discussion of climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, DEI programs, immigration policy, marriage, and abortion does not teach students those issues most fundamental to our current climate, and especially does not educate those who intend to advocate for these same marginalized communities.

Having studied Neuroscience and Bioethics in the STEM field, this bill also has significant consequences for the way scientific research and education are conducted. The attempt to police discussions of "controversial" topics is very concerning in this respect as well. Science exists only through rigorous debate, evidence-based conclusions, and the free exchange of ideas. If this bill forces universities to censor discussions around these issues, it will drive away top faculty, reduce funding opportunities, and limit the ability of students like me to receive the best possible education. If Ohio wants to remain competitive in research and innovation, we must resist government overreach into academia.

I can confidently say that had this legislation been in place when I was deciding where to pursue higher education after high school, I would have chosen the Pennsylvania university that I would have attended rather than Cincinnati. Similarly, at the law school level, I would have had no

desire to attend a school – while intending to learn about advocacy for those who need it – at a University that would not allow for my teachers to teach these subjects.

As a woman and an LGBTQ+ student, I know and have experienced how important DEI initiatives are in creating a sense of belonging for students and fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Programs that support students from different groups help students like me navigate challenges of life and of higher education, as well as to build community and access critical resources.

By banning DEI initiatives, this bill sends a clear message that Ohio does not value diversity or equal opportunity. It tells marginalized students that we are not welcome, and that you do not care about us. This will only make it harder for our universities to recruit and retain talent. If we truly want Ohio's higher education system to thrive, we must embrace inclusivity, not erase it.

The respect that I have for my professors, who dedicate their lives to educating the next generation of passionate young students, is immense. This bill's deprivation of their right to strike undermines their rights and ability to organize when necessary, especially in the interest of fair work and academic freedom. Similarly, the policy of Post-Tenure Review could be detrimental to getting and retaining talented faculty in the state of Ohio. Why teach at a University in Ohio when alternatives exist with the ability to organize when necessary and the traditional tenure track that doesn't leave educators vulnerable to review at every turn?

As a student, that is a frightening shot in the foot for those undergoing education in the state.

Higher education should prepare students to engage critically with the world, not shield them from complex discussions. I urge this committee to reject Senate Bill 1 and protect the academic freedom that makes Ohio's universities competitive, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant.

Thank you.