

Testimony of Jennifer Suchland, Ph.D., Before the House Workforce and Higher Education
Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair

March 11 , 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chari Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Jennifer Suchland, and I am a professor at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for seventeen years. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I oppose Senate Bill 1 because it threatens to silence education about violence against women and gender-based violence. Professionals working in healthcare, social work, and non-profit service provision will never come to OSU if we are prohibited from discussing what some legislators misleadingly call "divisive."

Gender violence feeds on silence. In a society that is afraid to openly talk about the body, gender and sexuality, silence grows and so too the cages of shame that impede healing, justice, and prevention. SB 1 threatens to grow that silence by repressing education about gender and sexuality by prohibiting discussion of "divisive topics" in university classrooms. SB 1 will protect those who perpetrate sexual harm.

What some legislators claim are "divisive topics" are in fact the very concerns that are finally out into the open. That is why SB 1 it is a blueprint to revert to the days when rape was legal, when no one knew or cared to know about human trafficking, or when sexual abuse was treated as only a private issue. It has taken a century or more to challenge these social norms and others that keep gender violence in the shadows. Sexual violence is protected by social norms that stigmatize sexuality and demean gender diversity. Education is the main way we can prevent violence, train professionals to work with survivors, and equip survivors with tools to name their experience.

Gender violence, like that perpetrated by intimate partners, college wrestling coaches, priests, or human traffickers, flourishes when we cannot research and teach about topics SB1 claims are divisive. Claiming that topics such as climate change, public policy, marriage, or abortion are are divisive and thus "off limits" throws us back into the days of religious authoritarianism when philosophers and scientists were called heretics if their ideas challenged the power of the Church or King. SB1 is elitist ideological overreach into university curriculum that is far beyond the expertise of these legislators. Please kill Senate Bill 1. It has no place in an open society that is committed to human rights. Please act by your conscience and not follow this ideological elitism.

Thank you for your time.

Jennifer Suchland