

Opponent Testimony for Ohio Senate Bill 1

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Madison Wesley, I am a fourth year Medical Sciences student and I am the Undergraduate Student Body President at the University of Cincinnati, representing over 40,000 undergraduate students. As I approach the final days of my term, I am here to voice the overwhelming opposition that my constituents—students at UC—have expressed regarding Senate Bill 1.

I come before you today not just with my own concerns, but with the voices of students who will be directly impacted by this bill. Over the past week alone, I have received and compiled written testimonies from students who fear the consequences of SB1 which you can see here in front of me. I will be speaking to the concerns expressed in these letters as it is my duty as their elected representative to ensure that their voices are heard. In addition to these written accounts, I have spoken with countless students who are deeply worried about the ways in which this legislation threatens their education and future opportunities.

One such student, from Appalachia, fears that the ripple effects of this bill could make it harder for students like her to pursue an education at the University of Cincinnati. For many first-generation and low-income students, access to a diverse and comprehensive curriculum is vital to their success. When scholarship opportunities and degree programs are cut due to restrictive policies, the path to higher education becomes even narrower.

Political science students, many of whom aspire to be public servants themselves, have voiced concerns that restrictions on teaching “controversial topics” will limit the scope of their education. How can we expect the next generation of policymakers, lawmakers, and community leaders to be well-equipped for public service if their education is censored? Higher education should challenge students to think critically, engage with complex issues, and prepare for the realities of the world they will be working in. This bill undermines that very purpose.

Students in smaller degree programs—such as a student I spoke with studying anthropology—worry that their fields of study may be among those eliminated. These concerns are not unfounded. If small programs are cut simply because they are not seen as financially lucrative, we risk losing entire disciplines that are essential to understanding and improving our society. Anthropologists, for example, contribute to fields such as public health, policy analysis, and social justice. We cannot afford to dismiss the importance of these fields simply because their value is not measured in immediate economic returns.

A pre-med student recently expressed fears that the implications of this bill could negatively affect the accreditation of Ohio medical schools and, by extension, their future career. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are not just theoretical concepts—they are critical to training culturally competent physicians who can serve diverse patient populations effectively. Medical students must be exposed to a range of perspectives and experiences to be well-prepared for

their careers. If Ohio's medical education system is weakened by restrictions on curriculum and faculty governance, it could make future physicians less competitive in residency applications and ultimately hinder their ability to provide the highest standard of care to their patients.

Beyond these individual concerns, this legislation poses a broader threat to the reputation and quality of higher education in Ohio. Limiting faculty bargaining power, restricting academic freedom, and eliminating degree programs will drive talented faculty and students elsewhere, making Ohio a less desirable place to study, teach, and innovate. This will diminish the value of our degrees and make it harder to attract and retain top talent in our state.

Public service is a privilege—one that requires listening to and acting on the concerns of constituents. The students I represent have made their opposition to SB1 clear. I urge you to listen to them, to take their concerns seriously, and to consider the long-term consequences of this legislation. I respectfully ask you to listen to your constituents and vote no on Senate Bill 1 in its current form.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.