

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Amanda Fehlbaum. I am an Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Women's and Gender Studies at Youngstown State University. I am also on the Board of Directors for the Northeast Ohio Education Association. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

There are many reasons for my opposition; however, I will focus on one here: the restriction of teaching "controversial topics."

When you are in grad school and seeking a doctorate, there is no guarantee that you will get a job, let alone a tenure track job at a university. I beat the odds in securing such a position, a testament not only to my years of study but also the hours I put in to honing my craft as an educator. I love learning and am privileged to hold a position where I get to pass on what I have learned to young people in courses such as "Gender in Society" and "Minority Groups." What I impart to them in the classroom as a sociologist involves the topics outlined as "controversial" in SB 1.

Despite Senator Cirino's claims that professors such as myself will still be allowed to discuss these topics, SB 1/HB6 is essentially a gag order and, as the American Sociological Association points out, an existential threat to my discipline. I need to teach my students about inequality, race, class, gender, sexuality, and more without fear of reprisal or running afoul of the law. I teach these things not to make people feel bad about themselves, to hurt feelings, or to indoctrinate them. Sociology is a science and these subject matters are based in scientific fact and theory, not conjecture. I do not insist that students take what I say as gospel; rather, I present them the evidence that sociological phenomena are real and objectively documented.

As my colleague Dr. Michael Schwalbe from North Carolina State University pointed out when Florida passed its own educational gag orders in relation to discussing race:

My point was never to make white students feel bad about advantages they enjoy in a society dominated by white people and in which white means normal. My point was to help them understand how the social world works, how they fit into it, and how others fit into it differently. If this induced any guilt, it would have been only because students felt it was wrong, according to their own sense of justice, to continue to reap benefits they hadn't earned, benefits that came at the expense of others.

Racial inequality, socioeconomic disparities, homophobia, discrimination against transgender folks, and other social problems are not going to disappear if sociology or these "controversial topics" are banished from the academy or college campuses or Ohio. Just like we need meteorology to tell us about the weather, we need sociology to tell us about society – even if what it reveals is as unpleasant as a tornado is to our communities.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful, misguided, and destructive bill.

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

Sincerely,
Amanda Fehlbaum, Ph.D.
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Director of Women's and Gender Studies
Youngstown State University