

Testimony of Sara Abou Rashed, MFA.
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

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

My name is Sara Abou Rashed and today I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Twelve years ago, I arrived to this country as a high school freshman not speaking any English. Word for word, I translated every textbook until I taught myself the language. Today, I stand before you as a writer, a proud graduate of Denison University and the University of Michigan, a TEDx and a two-time commencement speaker, a former lecturer of Writing and literature and a mentor at multiple higher ed institutions including CCAD and OSU.

At Denison, I was the only student out of 2,000 wearing the headscarf. On campus, I stood out everywhere I went, and difference became a permanent part of who I am, so much so I created a one-woman show about it. Instead of succumbing to feeling out of place, I became more involved in efforts to pave the way for other minority students. Without the support I received from faculty and staff who understood me and saw me for the identities and experiences I carried, I wouldn't have been the successful person I am today. I would not have been selected for the Harvard Public Policy

Leadership program where I learned from Marshall Ganz about what makes a community organizer, I wouldn't have been named a national finalist for the Truman scholarship or awarded a Beinecke scholarship which eventually funded my graduate studies. I certainly would not have been selected at twenty-two as the youngest trainer for the American Foreign Service Exchange Program where educators from all over the world gather in DC to learn how to welcome students with different kinds of stories.

I am not here to list my accomplishments out of grandeur but to tell you who I've managed to become in a short time in this country simply when given the space to grow and be all that I am. At Denison, I went into campus not represented by a single person and left it as a presidential medalist and the single student who spoke on behalf the entire student body on graduation day.

Who would I have been if SB 1 was in place and I was at OSU? Certainly, not this. This bill is asking us to mute our voices, to erase every sign of difference, to lose the support and the funding that sustains minority students.

When we say DEI, we say diversity, equity and inclusion. Look around this room alone—do we look alike? Do we not deserve equitable, inclusive treatment? And allow me to ask you, what is the inverse of all the progress that's been made on this front? Sameness, barriers and exclusion? Is this the future we want to hand our incoming students? One that says, I don't

see color, I don't see difference, I don't see your particular set of challenges and therefore I don't see you at all.

This is the single most harmful bill for our universities and beloved State of Ohio at large. This is a bill rooted in fear, not protection. How afraid must one be to want to instill fear in others? Fear of knowledge, fear of equity, fear of belonging, of our own innate curiosity. Ridiculous and incredibly harmful as it is, at the core, this is a bill asking us to be afraid of stories. Personal stories, historical stories, national stories, stories of our own past, stories of our land grants, of massacres and genocides traced in our tongues and skin colors. It is asking us to move and live with fear of our professors, our roommates, our classrooms. I have fled Syria where saying the wrong thing throws one in prison, what you might deem a dictatorship... if this bill passes, who's to decide what's controversial and what's acceptable? How fragile must we be to choose fear as our guide! How so afraid of our own capabilities, of what we might become if only we were exposed to truth. Censorship and erasure are never the answer; if anything, whatever is hidden will only become more desirable.

How afraid must we be that so much as a story we want to deem a crime.