

Testimony of Dr. Cynthia Callahan, PhD.
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 Cynthia Callahan, and I am an associate professor of English at the Ohio State University, where I have taught for nearly 20 years. I do not represent Ohio State but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen who cares deeply about the quality of public education for all Ohio citizens.

I strongly oppose SB 1, not only for its impact on how I do my job, but because it will take resources away from the students who need it the most.

I am privileged to work and teach at one of Ohio State's regional campuses, where nearly 50% of my students are the first in their families to attend college. They are the direct beneficiaries of the state's commitment to access and affordability for all Ohioans. They will suffer from this legislation. It adds layers of bureaucracy to an already overburdened administrative system, redirecting funds away from the students who need it most.

Moreover, SB 1 assumes that my students are not encouraged to think for themselves. The center of my pedagogy is to encourage evidence-based critical thinking from my students. I do not tell them what to think; I only ask that they explain why they come to the conclusions they do. As someone who teaches introductory and advanced American and African American literature, I often expose my students to ideas that they have not encountered before. I do so carefully, with recognition that those ideas may be uncomfortable (to different people for different reasons). In fact, I spend a full class period walking students through the process of establishing their own standards for productive engagement. Each semester, students come to a similar conclusion: they want conversations grounded in the texts that we discuss, engagement with the ideas and not attacks on the individual who shares said ideas. I remind them that at some point, each person will probably feel uncomfortable, because reckoning with our collective past can be distressing. I also tell them that guilt about the past is unproductive; knowledge is the point.

I share this part of my lessons because it illustrates the care that I take to avoid marginalizing any student in my class. And the students rise to the occasion, having thoughtful discussions about difficult ideas. When there are conflicts, I mediate and help them move forward. This is the kind of civic engagement that I believe the legislature is striving for. But we're doing this already, and I think we're doing it well.

SB 1 assumes that faculty do not approach controversial issues with care, and that students are not secure enough in their own values to learn our national history and decide for themselves. This is a mistake.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Callahan, PhD.

Associate Professor of English