

Testimony of Laura Pearce, MA, MA  
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 Laura Pearce, and I am a staff member at The Ohio State University, where I have worked for five years. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

SB1 will do irreparable harm to education and economic development in Ohio. It seeks to create a massive administrative burden and culture of surveillance to counter a problem that does not exist. Survey after survey in state after state has shown that university students do not find themselves pressured by professors into espousing any political preference, but rather that professors allow them to critically explore difficult topics from all angles. Universities are some of the leading institutions teaching diversity of thought and modeling civil dialogue on issues that people frequently refuse to hear the other side of. For example, Ohio State's Center for Ethics and Human Values has for years supported a Civil Discourse program which includes open forums where undergraduates and faculty together openly but respectfully question the different sides of topics such as immigration, affirmative action, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This is the kind of work that goes on every day in universities, and which would be stopped by SB1. SB1's vague language puts universities at risk simply by discussing anything at all, and its requirements will take resources away from productive programs to create a new bureaucracy that replicates what the university already does, because the legislature has for some reason decided it must be done twice.

If the Ohio legislature is interested in supporting student well-being and growth, it should focus on the problems that exist. For example, providing greater funding to universities with the stipulation that the money must be used to lower tuition costs, as one of the greatest sources of stress and a factor in why students do not complete college is the financial burden. This would in fact cost the legislature less than paying for the new bureaucracies, lawsuits, and brain drain that SB1 would create, causing massive short-term expense and giving up long-term growth. SB1 is nothing but identity politics posturing that is designed to get Jerry Cirino a chance to go on national television, not to serve the people of Ohio. The volume of testimony against it in the Senate (98% of all testimony submitted) shows that nearly all Ohioans oppose this legislation. If this House intends to represent the people of Ohio, and not Senator Cirino's ego, it cannot pass this bill.

Thank you,  
Laura Pearce