

Alexander Poling, Written Testimony on Senate Bill 1, March 10, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit this opponent testimony. My name is Alexander Poling, and I graduated from The Ohio State University's School of Environment and Natural Resources last year. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1.

I believe that clear boundaries between public institutions of higher education and partisan interests are fundamental to the success of universities and colleges, and this bill, despite its stated goals, would blur those boundaries in many devastating ways. If this bill doesn't favor a certain political party, then why isn't it bipartisan?

I went to an Ohio public high school in an area that was mostly white, Christian, and conservative, so the perspectives I was exposed to were limited by a mostly homogenous community. And while I still learned a lot there, going to college gave me so many opportunities to interact with different people and viewpoints I was rarely if ever exposed to before then. Many of my friends and peers were in programs like the Morrill Scholarship Program and the Young Scholars Program, both housed under Ohio State's Office of Diversity and Inclusion until recently, and some of those students could never have gone to college without them because they didn't have equal opportunities. I went to events for Black History Month, Women's History Month, Chinese New Year, Immigration Awareness Week, and more, and despite my not being a part of any of these communities as a US-born white man, learning about diverse experiences and perspectives was tremendously valuable to me. I loved completing a Diversity, Intercultural and Community Engagement Certificate when I was a student. Diversity, equity, and inclusion benefits all of us – it makes our research better, our medical care better, our education better – because having more perspectives and life experiences sparks creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, and ultimately helps us make better, more informed decisions.

Much of the language of this bill is predicated on ideas that simply aren't true. I never felt dismissed, discriminated against, or mistreated at Ohio State due to my being a white man. I was never hurt by other students receiving DEI-related support. I have seen students with all sorts of opinions (including the openly conservative ones) in leadership roles in major student organizations and speaking out often and freely in classes. Do other students always like their opinions? No, but they aren't being stopped from saying what they want to say by our universities. Someone not wanting to be their friend is, of course, not discrimination. But I have seen college students mistreated at our universities. I've seen people yell racial slurs at Black students on the Oval. I've known students who were assaulted by other students for being Chinese. I've seen Disabled students fight for months just to get legally required accommodations. This bill would take away all university-sponsored social support for these students to connect to other students with similar experiences. It wouldn't address discrimination through comprehensive trainings – issues would only be addressed once students have already been harmed. It prohibits universities from being

proactive to protect students. And that's without even considering the systemic issues that certainly don't give many marginalized students "equal opportunities."

This bill would require all undergraduate students to take an American civil literacy course in order to graduate. It should be emphasized that most college students will have taken a US Government or Civics course in high school, as it is required in most states, and most if not all of this content would be review for them. The hyper-specific nature of the reading requirements in this bill severely limits faculty involvement in the creation of a course that is presumably their subject of expertise. Why should this be dictated by politicians rather than qualified professors? The required readings were all written by men, only one of them not white. Should students not be required to engage with more perspectives to promote intellectual diversity? If students are to learn about capitalism, should they not hear critiques of capitalism too? Should we not teach them about communism and socialism, which have certainly had a significant impact on US government and history as well? This section makes a mockery of the claim that the goal of this bill is to promote intellectual diversity.

In addition, as someone who has been a student but never a faculty member of any institution, I want faculty members to be able to go on strike. I want the people who have worked so hard to teach and support me to be paid and treated fairly, and if receiving that requires a strike, so be it. You are not supporting students by taking away the rights of our teachers.

I am also opposed to the part of this bill that severely limits the power of all student trustees, including the ones for The Ohio State University, who have previously had the power to vote. Students already do not have much power on these boards, and taking away most of the little power they have will not help students in any way. Senator Cirino has called these students "customers of these institutions", so why shouldn't those customers have a direct say in issues affecting them? Students deserve representation, and I support all student trustees at Ohio universities having the full rights of other trustees (with the exception of term lengths), including voting rights.

As has been made clear by the hundreds of faculty members, staff, and students who have submitted opponent testimony on and otherwise made statements against this and similar bills, the changes this bill seeks to make are deeply unpopular among the populations that will be most affected and are the most qualified to understand these issues and make decisions about them. I believe it is very inappropriate for our state legislatures to be exerting so much power over our colleges and universities despite the astounding amount of opposition from their constituents. That is why I am firmly against Senate Bill 1.