

Matthew C. Connolly, PhD
10 March 2025
Subject: Testimony Opposing HB6/SB1

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

Unfortunately, despite a state house packed with concerned teachers and students, despite a mere fifteen testimonies in favor and nearly one thousand against, despite eight hours of opponent testimony exposing its policing of student thinking and learning from educators across the political divide, SB1 was hastily pushed through the senate. So many opponent testimonies were sent to Chair Roegner that some were processed and posted only well after they were sent in. And it's likely many were never posted, period. Even if we extend our grace, even if we recognize that these delayed testimonies are the result of understandable processing difficulties and bureaucratic strain, this failure still tells a larger story: opposition to the ideas in this bill is massive.

Having been rushed through regardless, the bill now enters your hands in the form of HB6. Committee members, this moment presents an opportunity to use your influence to protect the integrity of higher ed in Ohio and to listen closely to educators who know the following from direct experience: first, that truth rises from difficult conversations about our differing perspectives; second, that confronting the legacies of our complicated past directly can shape and direct a more just future. And finally, that truth is crushed by mandates dictating how to teach, think, and learn.

I teach at Columbus State Community College and have over twelve years of experience in the college classroom. I can tell you this with confidence: educators already care about students from all walks of life, with varying life experiences, with multiple political viewpoints, and with diverse perspectives. As a writing instructor, I teach my students to tell their stories, to gauge multiple viewpoints other than their own, and to act on their well-earned convictions. HB6 suffocates that curiosity, substituting its own viewpoint for everyone else's. How can a bill embrace intellectual diversity by mandating what can and cannot be taught in the classroom? Common sense says it can't. HB6 creates an atmosphere of thought policing and reporting that will suffocate the intellectual diversity it claims to promote. It may fear so-called brainwashing in higher-ed but is itself brainwashed by culture-war paranoia. The stakes are high. Our state will lose gifted students and gifted faculty should this bill pass. Even more troubling, we'll lose the freedom to think, to argue, and to listen with open minds, without fear of retribution.

Thank you for considering my viewpoint. I hope you will use your influence to save higher education from HB6's dogmatic understanding of the learning process.

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