

## **Opponent Testimony - Zachary Graves**

Representing Kent State University's Undergraduate Student Government

House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

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

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Zachary Graves, and I serve as the Student Body Vice President of Kent State University's Undergraduate Student Government. I am here today to speak in opposition of Senate Bill 1 as an elected representative of Kent State's student body. On February 19, the Undergraduate Student Government voted unanimously to condemn Senate Bill 1, and on February 26, we took an advocacy trip to the Statehouse to discuss our disagreements on the bill with state legislators. The fight against the various versions of Senate Bill 1 has been occurring since my first year of college, and today, as a senior during my spring break, the fight continues.

At Kent State, we pride ourselves on the idea that "Flashes take care of Flashes." On the side of our library, a banner that can be seen across campus hangs, stating "you belong here." If Senate Bill 1 were to become law, parts of our university that work to ensure students feel cared for and welcomed would cease to exist. Our identity centers, including the Women's Center, the E. Timothy Moore Student Multicultural Center, and the LGBTQ+ Center, which each provide vital resources, events, spaces, and opportunities for all students, would be gone. This negatively impacts our ability to support students with marginalized identities, celebrate our identities, and cultivate a sense of belonging on campus.

In addition, Senate Bill 1 puts restrictions on the teaching of vaguely described "controversial beliefs or policies," which includes discussions of "climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion." At Kent State, our School of Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as our Political Science, Environmental Science, Africana Studies, Jewish Studies, Women's Studies, and LGBTQ+

Studies programs would all be jeopardized. The whole point of higher education is to explore new perspectives and develop your own opinions through critical thinking. By limiting the topics of discussion in the classroom, Senate Bill 1 embraces censorship and micromanages what professors can and cannot teach.

Finally, Senate Bill 1 will damage the reputation and financial stability of universities across Ohio. Prospective college students want to attend institutions of higher education that are diverse, accepting, supportive, and respected. By eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, limiting academic freedom, and vilifying professors, students will be driven away from Ohio's colleges and universities. Schools that are already experiencing decreased enrollment will continue to see lower numbers of students attending, affecting the tuition dollars received by the state, the tourism market, and statewide job numbers.

Senate Bill 1 is a part of a misguided national movement targeting expertise, inclusion, and freedom, and if passed, higher education in this state will be badly impacted. As a lifelong Ohioan, current college student, and representative of the Kent State student body, I strongly urge you to vote "no" on Senate Bill 1. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions from the committee.

Sincerely,

Zachary Graves

Student Body Vice President, Kent State University Undergraduate Student Government