

Testimony of Caitlin A. Kane, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 10, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Caitlin Kane, and I am an assistant professor of theatre history at Kent State University. I do not represent Kent State but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I have lived in Ohio for most of my life and have been a student and educator in K-12 schools and universities in multiple regions of the state – I speak from this breadth of experience in and commitment to Ohio schools.

I am a scholar of feminist, queer, and trans theatre and performance, and an award-winning teacher of theatre history and dramatic literature. Despite popular narratives regarding liberal biases on college campuses, my students repeatedly and consistently – regardless of their political perspectives – refute the claim that college campuses are engaged in progressive indoctrination. My students ARE hungry for a wider range of perspectives in their curriculum, but the perspectives and histories that they tell me are missing from their educations are the very perspectives and subjects that this bill threatens to erase through confusing and vague language about somehow ensuring equality in our institutions while also limiting our ability to address the experiences of large portions of our student population. Without fail, my facilitation of nuanced discussions about subjects that could fall under the heading of “controversial subjects” especially the histories and experiences of women, queer and trans individuals, people with disabilities, and people of color, are celebrated by students in and out of class and on anonymous evaluations of my teaching. If educators cannot teach about or discuss supposedly controversial issues (many of which are being wrongfully politicized in this bill) we will ultimately be denying our students access to a well-rounded education that covers the breadth of perspectives in our fields of study and, equally importantly, the breadth of experiences in our students lives and communities. I understand that this legislation does not directly impact what we can teach in our classrooms, but it will have a chilling effect on academic freedom and will disproportionately affect students from minority groups.

Based on what my students and colleagues have shared with me, I am deeply concerned that Senate Bill 1 will push talented students, staff, and faculty out of state. Many of my brightest students are already questioning whether Ohio is the right place for them. They want to attend universities where they can engage in open discussions, explore challenging ideas, and be part of diverse and inclusive communities. This bill tells them that Ohio does not value those things. By eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, restricting faculty freedom, and imposing vague ideological restrictions, Senate Bill 1 sends a clear message: Ohio is not committed to academic excellence or student success.

The departure of students, staff, and faculty will not just hurt universities—it will have lasting consequences for Ohio’s economy and workforce. When students, staff, and faculty leave for better opportunities in other states, they take their talent, innovation, and leadership with them. I urge this committee to think beyond partisan politics and consider the long-term damage this bill will do to our state’s future.