

Testimony of Kristen E. Reiter, M.S.
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 Kristen Reiter, and I am a professor of Biology at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), where I have taught for three years. I do not represent Tri-C, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen of Ohio.

Our founding fathers wrote and codified the Constitution of the United States to establish the framework of our federal government with the goals to form a more perfect Union by establishing Justice, ensuring domestic Tranquility, providing for common defense, promoting general Welfare, and securing the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

The Bill of Rights, a series of ten amendments to the Constitution ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures includes the first amendment, which prohibits the passing of law that prohibits the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech and the press, and the right to peaceably assemble and protest. These two documents serve as the foundation for the strength and prosperity of the democracy of the United States. Any infringement on the rights granted American citizens is an attack on the vision of democracy set into motion by our founding fathers. Unfortunately, some of the changes outlined in HB6/SB1 directly prohibit certain types of speech, which is in violation of American citizens' first amendment rights.

To prohibit which topics can be discussed in a college or university classroom is in stark opposition to freedom of speech. How could a history instructor, for example, adequately teach about U.S. history if they are unable to discuss issues faced by a significant portion of historical Americans? How could a professor of epidemiology teach about the eradication of devastating illnesses such as smallpox and polio if they are unable to discuss vaccine development? Not only does limiting the topics discussed in the classroom directly violate the first amendment to the Constitution, it also directly interferes with the quality of education Ohio will be able to provide prospective students.

Students are fully aware that their education will be compromised should this bill be passed into law. Young Ohioans have already begun to make plans to attend colleges and universities out-of-state, and potential out-of-state applicants are turning away from Ohio to find their top-choice schools. Ohio is home to many major universities of high regard (THE Ohio State University, Ohio University, Kent State University, Case Western and NEOMED, etc.). As attendance to these universities drops in response to the passing of HB6/SB1, the negative consequences on Ohio's economy will be two-fold.

1) Higher education students contribute significantly to our economy - they buy food, clothing, housing, electronics, vehicles, etc. from Ohio businesses every day, not to mention the tuition that they pay to Ohio schools. With fewer students entering Ohio and many prospective students leaving the state to pursue education, we will have fewer and fewer Ohioans to spend money to fuel our economy. Clothing retailers, bars and restaurants, car dealerships, etc. found in "college towns" will suffer an economic decline. This harm to our economy would pose a threat to *all* Ohioans, not just those involved in higher education.

2) As fewer people seek out higher education in Ohio, there will be fewer and fewer Ohioans with the education to fill trained positions such as lawyers, doctors, nurses, business executives, schoolteachers, etc. This means that either out-of-state individuals will take these high-paying jobs from Ohio citizens **or** that Ohio citizens will have to suffer through the diminishing availability of services provided by those with higher education. For example, there may be far fewer health professionals, leading to strain on our medical institutions, such as the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic. This could lead to extended wait times to receive medical care or the closure of hospitals across the state. This will directly impact our economy as Ohio citizens will have their career prospects limited, which in turn, could mean less funds to spend on clothes, food, housing, etc., further harming the Ohio economy.

The great new is that unlike required public education, higher education is voluntary, and the classes taken by a student are also that student's choice. Instead of prohibiting certain topics from being discussed in relevant classes, students opposed to learning of those topics could simply not sign up to take such classes. This will preserve the students' rights to avoid topics that they do not agree with or do not want to interact with while keeping our rights to free speech and the rights of other students to learn and prepare for future careers intact.

I was born and raised in Ohio and have lived here all of my life. I love this state more than any other, I see its beauty and the wonderful citizens of Ohio each and every day. I do not want to see our wonderful democracy and the vision of our founding fathers to be tarnished in our great state of Ohio. I do not want to see an economic decline and relapse into a recession, similar to the one we experienced 15 years ago. I want to see Ohioans flourish, succeed, and represent the ideals that our country was founded on.

Please consider the impact on the strength of our Constitution of the United States and on the Ohio economy when deliberating on this bill.

Thank you for your time,
Kristen Reiter, M.S.