

Testimony of Sara Yurkovic
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee,
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

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

I am a community college assistant professor, representing only myself, writing to strongly oppose and express my concern about Senate Bill 1 and the companion House Bill 6. This bill undermines collective bargaining rights, limits academic freedom, and imposes rigid faculty workload and evaluation policies without regard for the needs of students, faculty, or institutions of higher education.

I am deeply concerned about this bill's restrictions on "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion." This will limit faculty's ability to share relevant historical and factual information with their students, leaving them unprepared to make decisions using appropriate context and critical thinking. In my experience as a student, at a community college and two universities, it was exposure to others' perspectives, historical context, and beliefs other than those I was raised with, that led me to critically think, evaluate what I already knew, and be able to empathize with others even when disagreeing. As of now, I am able to share a wide array of information with my students, allowing them to come to their own conclusions and meaningfully engage with past and current topics in their chosen field. Limiting topics for discussion directly opposes the bill's desire to see more intellectual diversity carried out in the classroom, which must include some controversial topics for students to have a full understanding of relevant issues and how consensus has been reached (or not) on topics impacting their future work.

SB1's further prohibition on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a practice across institutions of higher education again limits the ideas that faculty and students will be exposed to, as well as disallows for acknowledgement and action based on historical truths. This, along with the limitations on collective bargaining and bargaining unit actions, likely means that many faculty and students will leave Ohio in search of institutions where they are not so restricted, meaning that the future of Ohio higher education may be in jeopardy. This will negatively impact not just future students, but their future employers and community members, as they will be less aware and prepared for what is required of them upon graduation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will stand with faculty and students by opposing this harmful legislation.

Sincerely,

Sara Yurkovic