



March 9, 2025

Opponent Testimony: Senate Bill 1

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

My name is Victoria Hickcox, and I am a Co-Founder of YUSRA, a grassroots Muslim-led coalition dedicated to justice, equity, and opportunity for all communities across Ohio. We work to ensure that young people, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, have the tools and resources to thrive in education, civic engagement, and public leadership. I stand in firm opposition to Senate Bill 1, a deeply harmful and regressive piece of legislation that will have devastating consequences for students, educators, and the broader Ohio community. It threatens the integrity of Ohio's higher education system, limits economic growth, and undermines student success.

A strong higher education system is critical to Ohio's economy, attracting businesses, fostering innovation, and preparing students for the workforce. SB 1 places unnecessary restrictions on academic freedom, weakens protections for faculty, and eliminates diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs that support student success. These changes will make Ohio's universities less competitive, discouraging top students, faculty, and businesses from investing in our state.

By limiting faculty protections and removing programs that help students from all backgrounds succeed, SB 1 makes Ohio's universities less appealing to educators and students alike. Additionally, many major employers prioritize diversity and inclusion in their hiring and investments. A state that eliminates DEI programs in higher education risks losing partnerships with companies that seek a well-prepared and diverse talent pool. The bill's restrictions on academic speech and tenure protections will discourage faculty from conducting groundbreaking research, leading to fewer grants and reduced economic contributions from Ohio's universities.

The elimination of tenure protections and faculty union rights will make it harder for Ohio to attract and retain top educators, ultimately lowering the quality of education for all students. When faculty feel unsupported or vulnerable to political interference, they are more likely to leave the state, taking their expertise and research funding with them. This harms not just universities, but Ohio's entire economy, which relies on strong educational institutions to produce a highly skilled workforce.

SB 1's restrictions on DEI initiatives eliminate programs that provide mentorship, scholarships, and career development opportunities for students, many of whom are first-generation college students or come from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Research shows that when students feel supported and included, retention and graduation rates increase, leading to a stronger workforce. Eliminating these programs would have the opposite effect, making it harder for students to succeed and contribute to Ohio's economy.

As an organization that mobilizes young leaders to engage civically and advocate for change, YUSRA rejects any policy that disempowers students. Historically, students have been at the forefront of movements for justice, including civil rights, anti-war protests, and the fight for fair labor practices. This bill seeks to curb that power, further disenfranchising the very people higher education should serve. Students should have a say in the policies that affect their education and future—SB 1 strips them of that right.

SB 1 imposes vague restrictions on what can be taught in the classroom, limiting discussions on important social, economic, and historical topics. This not only infringes on academic freedom but also weakens Ohio's reputation as a center for higher education excellence. Colleges and universities should be places where students learn to think critically, debate ideas, and engage with diverse perspectives—skills that are essential in today's job market.

Ohio's higher education institutions are vital to the state's economic growth and national reputation. By discouraging investment in Ohio's universities, making it harder to attract and retain top talent, and limiting opportunities for student success, SB 1 weakens Ohio's ability to compete in a rapidly changing economy. Instead of policies that restrict opportunity, we urge lawmakers to support initiatives that strengthen Ohio's education system, attract top-tier talent, and prepare students for the workforce of the future.

YUSRA fights for a future where all students—regardless of race, religion, or background—have the right to an education that is honest, inclusive, and empowering.

I urge this committee to reject SB 1 and instead pursue policies that expand educational access, uphold academic excellence, and ensure that Ohio remains a leader in higher education and workforce development.

Thank you for your time and consideration.