

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Laura Rushton. I have a Master's degree in education from Ohio State University. For most of my career I taught in both public and private schools in Richland County. I also served 7 years on the board of Foundation Academy. Now I volunteer as a tutor in the Berea school district. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

This bill proposes sweeping changes to the academic curriculum and programs of our public universities. It will stifle the learning environment for students and the working conditions for faculty. I am particularly worried about how it affects the universities' ability to attract and retain talented teachers who promote the kind of free inquiry and discussion that allows students to apply their critical thinking skills to a range of problems. Ohio needs to prevent the "brain drain" that happens when young people leave the state to pursue opportunities elsewhere. Teachers who feel constrained by the new restrictions imposed by this bill, including limits on the expression of views on subjects deemed "controversial" by the state, will be less likely to stay. They will lose their ability to negotiate favorable working conditions with the ban on collective bargaining and removal of tenure, so their positions will be less secure. Some departments will be eliminated, leading students who want to study those fields to go outside the state.

I believe that Ohio's universities should prepare students for the complex demands of a changing world. They need to be engaged in research and inquiry and open dialogue led by professors who are experts in their fields. Academic freedom is necessary for this kind of intellectual development. If there is a preponderance of evidence that greenhouse gases are causing the planet to overheat, that should be examined and discussed without fear of repercussions from those who disagree. When state law prohibits what it vaguely defines as "controversial" topics, or dictates the terms on which they are taught, there can be no academic freedom. Only by allowing our universities the freedom to set their own curriculum and protocols will Ohio continue to be a leader in research and innovation. That leadership creates jobs and prosperity for everyone.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

*[If you are testifying in-person]* I will now take any questions you may have.