

Testimony of Katie Rapson-Stecula, MA, LPCC
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:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Katie Rapson-Stecula. I am a resident of Franklin County; I live with my husband, who is a professor at The Ohio State University, and my 16 month old son, in Columbus. I am employed as a mental health therapist and hold my LPCC in Ohio. I am strongly opposed to SB 1.

My husband has dedicated his adult life to studying, researching, and teaching about ways polarization in the media have had negative impacts on our democracy. His work includes various examples of how this has been disastrous along with a number of ways we, as Americans, can work towards common ground to have civil discourse and come to compromising solutions to ensure a safer, more productive, and more representative country. Contrary to what some might assume of him and his work, he is not an ideologue wanting to indoctrinate students or push his “leftist” agenda. Somewhat ironically, he is often berated on the left for his research findings. Any look into his published peer review papers, appearances in the media, and syllabi for his students will highlight his rigorous practice of impartiality and encouragement of critical thinking.

Aspects of this bill would essentially work to ensure that, should he continue to research or teach about how things like climate change and vaccines have become politicized by the left and the right, and the implications this can have on the country, he would likely be silenced or fired for doing so. What kind of education would students be receiving if the encouragement of critical thinking about very real problems our country faces, such as continued polarization, are silenced? Is the intention of this bill really to ensure that students are not taught about topics that might have some political controversy? Is the assumption that said university students have zero ability to come to logical conclusions on their own?

As a mental health therapist, I am very supportive of Governor DeWine’s initiatives to expand mental health access across Ohio. However, SB1 and expanded mental health services cannot coexist. All behavioral health providers across the US and in the state of Ohio have requirements for education and licensure; a part of these requirements would fall under the prohibited training in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion under SB1. Therefore, individuals completing their higher education and training in the state of Ohio *would not be eligible to obtain any licensure in the state of Ohio*, or any other state in the US. Ohioans will suffer from the drain of behavioral health providers that will undoubtedly occur should SB1 be passed.

As a parent who wants their child to grow up in a country where critical thinking is encouraged, as a spouse who wants her husband to continue to have a positive impact with his profession, as a mental health therapist who wants to see expanded access to services for all Ohioans, and as a citizen of this state who wants to ensure that higher education is not micromanaged by those who have obvious political agendas, I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful, extremist, discriminatory, and destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.