

Testimony of Eugenia R. Romero, Ph.D
Before the House Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 9, 2025

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

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Eugenia Romero, and I am a professor of Iberian Studies in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Ohio State University, where I have had the privilege of teaching for over 20 years. I do not speak on behalf of Ohio State University but rather submit this testimony as both a private citizen and a concerned parent of a college-bound student. I am writing to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1, as it presents grave risks to freedom of speech, academic freedom, and the foundational principles that underpin higher education.

Senate Bill 1 seeks to impose significant restrictions on the subjects and perspectives that students can explore within the framework of higher education. **This bill threatens to undermine the very essence of our academic institutions by curtailing the breadth of knowledge available to students.** As a parent, I am deeply concerned that my child—and all students—will be deprived of a rigorous and open-minded education, one that fosters critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of truth. **Education should provide a platform for students to engage with diverse ideas, challenge their assumptions, and develop their own informed perspectives. Instead, SB1 risks narrowing that platform and denying students the ability to engage with a full range of academic inquiry.**

One of the most troubling aspects of this bill is its direct threat to academic freedom. **At its core, higher education must be a space where the free exchange of ideas is not just encouraged but protected. To limit academic discussion and impose constraints on the range of topics that can be explored, is to weaken the very purpose of education itself.** We cannot expect students to become effective, competitive professionals if they are denied the intellectual freedom to explore complex and diverse issues. Higher education must cultivate the tools of critical thought necessary for students to engage in the rapidly changing global marketplace. By stifling that exploration, SB1 hinders our capacity to prepare students for the future.

Moreover, the bill's provisions could disproportionately harm historically marginalized communities. Higher education is one of the most powerful vehicles for social mobility, yet SB1 threatens to further entrench inequalities by limiting access to the full range of educational opportunities. The bill will effectively create barriers for underrepresented students, exacerbating the inequities that already exist in our society. By denying students the chance to access a diverse education, SB1 jeopardizes the social progress and opportunities that are central to the promise of higher education.

As a parent, I have always encouraged my child to think independently and critically about the world around them. I have never censored their access to ideas, and I am proud of their intellectual development as an open-minded, inquisitive young adult. **As an educator, I approach my students in the same manner: fostering their ability to critically engage with various perspectives, encouraging independent thought, and preparing them to navigate a complex world. I can't help but worry that SB1 would limit my ability to continue doing my job.** The bill

imposes unnecessary oversight and bureaucracy that would divert resources and time away from the core mission of educating students. Faculty are already engaged in curriculum development, student evaluation, and the creation of syllabi—all of which are tailored to serve the academic growth of students. To add additional restrictions and layers of bureaucracy is counterproductive, and it reduces the time and attention we can dedicate to cultivating the next generation of thinkers, leaders, and professionals.

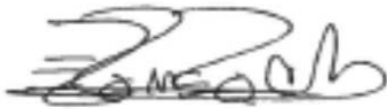
Higher education should be a space that fosters growth, creativity, and the pursuit of truth. This bill threatens to create a climate of fear and restriction, which could stunt intellectual exploration and diminish the quality of education across Ohio's institutions. As someone who has dedicated their life to teaching, I am deeply troubled by the direction this bill takes. **I ask you to let us teach our students, and to let them learn without fear.**

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to reconsider the provisions outlined in Senate Bill 1. Instead of creating an environment that encourages intellectual growth and innovation, this bill risks undermining our educational institutions and diminishing Ohio's standing in the competitive landscape of higher education. By diverting resources away from students and faculty to unnecessary administrative oversight, the bill will make it more difficult for Ohio to attract the best and brightest minds to our universities. Ultimately, this will harm not only the future of our students, but the future of our state, by contributing to the "brain drain" and undermining our state's long-term economic competitiveness.

As you know, the opposition to this bill is undeniable. Over 800 opponent testimonies were received, hundreds of people showed up to the Statehouse to protest, as well as tens of thousands of emails were sent in opposition. By contrast, only 14 individuals submitted testimony in favor of the bill, and none of those were students. Since SB1 has now come to the House, it's obvious that the majority of senators completely ignored the people of Ohio, and particularly, the students and professors. **I respectfully ask that you vote against this bill to protect the future of higher education in Ohio and ensure that our universities remain spaces where diverse thoughts, ideas, and perspectives are embraced.** By doing so, we will continue to offer pathways to opportunity for all Ohioans and safeguard the promise of education as a force for social mobility and equality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eugenia R. Romero', written in a cursive style.

Eugenia R. Romero, Ph.D.