

## **Testimony of Jessica Hagge**

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Representative Tom Young, Chair

**March 11, 2025**

Good Morning. Thank you Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jessica, and I am here to urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

I come from a family of academics and professors, scattered across the country. And I have been an undergraduate student at The Ohio State for three years now. As my friends and family know, graduate school has been a dream of mine for quite some time. But as I watch my state bow to the whims of just a few men, rather than the students of its universities, I have begun to second guess myself. “DEI put certain ideas off limits,” Jerry Cirino says. And his response is to place limits on the discussion of ideas through ambiguous wording about “controversial beliefs and policies.” To cut funding for schools if they don’t fall in line. We, the students, see it for what it is— unwelcome and unwarranted state surveillance. This has never been about free speech or free ideas, rather this is about pushing conformity onto our universities. Perhaps the saddest part of it all is that many of these politicians purport to know The Truth about everything— all the secrets of the universe. I find that fundamentally incurious but also revealing of a deep misunderstanding about the nature of education. There is no “one answer”— there is no “one way” the world works. And part of why this is so deeply devastating for so many of us is that this bill so clearly seeks to establish conformity, to erase those nuances

of learning— the joys and struggles of finding out that everything everywhere is infinitely more complicated than you could ever expect. That's why I want— why I *wanted* to go to graduate school here, in this place that I love.

Please, I ask you all— as politicians, as businessmen— to listen to *us*, the students, the staff, and the *people* gathered here today. One does not become an activist for fun, as some might suggest. One becomes an activist out of necessity, when the politicians who were elected to represent the people fail at their most crucial duty, as the members of the senate who passed this bill did. I love this state, we all love this state, but if this state proves it does not love us— if it seeks to prevent us from using our constitutional right to speak freely, if it smothers education with the hand of the state— the hands of politicians and donors who have not been in the classroom with us for quite some time— if the the government pass this bill, a bill *hated* by the people of this state, then they hate us. And those of us who are able to will have no choice but to leave. And with us, we will take our families full of future students, our professors and the millions of dollars of research grants they bring to the universities each year, and the prestige our universities once had. Thank you. Please vote no on this dangerous bill before it harms the future of the people and their universities across the state.