

Opponent Testimony for Ohio Senate Bill 1
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:

My name is Lisa Voigt. I was a faculty member at The Ohio State University from 2008 to 2023, and I am currently the parent of a second-year student at Ohio State. SB 1 will have detrimental consequences to higher education in Ohio that I can attest to personally.

I left my first academic job at the University of Chicago for Ohio State in 2008, in part because I was attracted to working at a public institution. I believe in the mission of public research universities like Ohio State because higher education is a public good, and I value Ohio State's motto in particular: *Education for Citizenship*. But SB 1 will not allow Ohio State to fulfill this worthy motto, because it will compel restricted, state-imposed indoctrination rather than the critical, fact-based inquiry and free exchange of ideas that are essential for great universities like OSU to thrive. The bill eviscerates the protections of tenure that allow faculty to pursue knowledge in our research and truth in our teaching without fear or favor.

I taught at OSU happily for 15 years until 2023, when I accepted an offer at Yale University. I decided to leave OSU in large part because of the push for a similar bill in the previous General Assembly (SB 83), as well as previous efforts to limit academic freedom and the lack of financial support for students that I have observed over the last decade in Ohio. I am not willing to sacrifice teaching the truth to my students about, for example, the histories of genocide, colonization, and slavery in the colonial Americas because of concerns that I could be accused of not promoting "intellectual diversity" on these topics. I am not willing to stop teaching students how to critically interpret texts and images because the state favors one interpretation of them.

My son attends OSU because of its excellent Moving Image Production program, and I love witnessing his intellectual and creative growth through the instruction of my former colleagues. When I shared an article with him about SB 1, his reaction reflected my own decision: he would not have chosen to attend OSU if this law existed. Should the bill pass, he will likely graduate before its impacts are fully felt across the university, but I would not discourage him from following in my footsteps and transferring elsewhere.

The bill displays a fundamental misunderstanding about what is happening at universities in Ohio, based on my many years of experience at OSU. I would encourage you to attend the classes of my former colleagues at Ohio State or to talk to their students. The bill sponsors are worried about "indoctrination," but the many requirements imposed by the bill, from syllabi and university statement mandates to requiring students to take specific, government-dictated courses to limiting discussions of what this bill determines to be "controversial belief[s] or

polic[ies],” would in fact lead to indoctrination. By restricting the discussion of certain topics as well as banning support for other forms of diversity, the bill reveals that it is not in fact seeking to promote “intellectual diversity” as it claims, but rather to promote the views of the bill authors and sponsors, who cannot possibly share the same expertise in our fields.

I recently attended a screening at OSU’s Wexner Center for the Arts of a documentary about Ernest Cole, a photographer of South Africa under apartheid. Introducing the film, the speaker mentioned overhearing students before the film who did not know what apartheid was. If this bill passes, would arguments in favor of apartheid need to be taught at OSU, or would apartheid be deemed too controversial to be taught? Would students be allowed to discuss why a recent [Executive Order](#) would grant the only exception for the current refugee ban to white Afrikaners, and what a longer history of “unjust racial discrimination” in that country and elsewhere entails?

It is not hard to foresee the destructive consequences of this bill on the state of Ohio; indeed, my decision to leave OSU is an example of those consequences. No doubt many others will follow. Please preserve the education of Ohio’s students and vote no SB 1.