

Testimony of Kirstine Taylor, Ph.D.
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:

My name is Kirstine Taylor, and I am a professor of Political Science at Ohio University, where I have taught for eight years. I do not represent Ohio University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I testify to urge you to vote no on the “Advancing Higher Education Act,” known as SB1. Masquerading as “advancement” and ensuring “intellectual diversity,” a careful read reveals that this bill is set to deliver to Ohio an enormously expensive, bureaucratically cumbersome, and surveillance-laden set of requirements for higher education statewide. The threat this bill poses is serious. It will endanger the prospects of young Ohioans by surveilling their learning environment, restricting their freedoms and the freedoms of their professors in the classroom, and increasing the financial burdens of the very colleges and universities that are already expensive to attend. Moreover, the limitations the bill introduces on collective bargaining are, undeniably, an attack on public sector employees.

Ohio has an incredible tradition of higher education. The landscape of this state is dotted with small, exclusive colleges, large public and private universities, and community colleges that together serve, according to Ohio’s Department of Higher Education, about half a million students every year. These young people deserve resource-rich education. I want to use the rest of my testimony pointing out two ways in which SB1 will impoverish the economic and civic futures of Ohio’s young people.

First, economic impoverishment. SB1 is riddled with contradictory, byzantine, unfunded mandates that will cause administrative costs for colleges and universities to soar. The oversight of instructor syllabi, the introduction of an American civic literacy requirement, the cutting of smaller programs (which actually generate money rather than draining it), the surveillance of “controversial” topics, and the restructuring and implementation of reporting guidelines are all costly bureaucratic taxes on universities. Will universities pass on these higher costs to students, increasing the already high financial burden of tuition in this state and pricing young people out of higher education at a time when so many face the economic hardships of rising costs, debt, and inflation? Or will it push universities to make cuts to academics, sports, and the campus amenities that make universities an enjoyable as well as

educational beacon for Ohio's young people? What a devastating and unnecessary choice to force upon this state's institutions of higher education.

Second, civic impoverishment. By outlawing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and introducing mechanisms of surveillance in classrooms that teach on “controversial” topics, SB1 restricts free, bold discussion and development of ideas in university classrooms. I'll share a moment that illustrates this. A very bright, engaged conservative student in my “Politics of Law” class asked me during lecture on Friday: “Isn't it the job of professors, kind of also like our teachers in high school, to be as objective as possible in what they teach?” It was a good question, and I answered it as honestly as possible. My job, as I see it, it of course to offer correct information and facts in the classroom; there is no room for disinformation. But my job is actually not *to be objective*, which is an utterly impossible task in a class dedicated to exploring how law is deeply political in nature. Rather, my job is to give students the conceptual and analytical tools to help them make sense of world, including the histories and current legal-political dynamics race, empire, gender, and the lives of working people. I don't want my students to guess what's in my head or my heart; I want them to develop theirs by *broadening*, not restricting, their knowledge base and their analytical capacities. What they do with those capacities is fully theirs. By outlawing DEI and introducing surveillance-laden rules around the teaching of “controversial” topics, SB1 would actually hamper rather than generate intellectual diversity in the classroom.

But I think you know this. My sense is that the sponsors of this bill are fully and comfortably aware that the political project here is restriction, surveillance, and the deadening of actual knowledge and actual intellectual diversity on university campuses.

The sponsors of SB1 are giving Ohio's young citizens a lesson in what it's like to be despised by their own political leadership. I'm with these students every day in the classroom, and truly, they deserve so much. They have their whole lives ahead of them. But here they are, teeming with experiences and ideas but knowing that their futures are being offered up in a crass political game. I know these young people. They show up and speak up and take notes and ask questions on some of the hardest issues facing this country. And this legislature is threatening to endanger their education by making it simultaneously more expensive and less vigorous.

I urge you to vote no on this bill.