

Opponent Testimony for SB1 / HB6  
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
March 9, 2025

Dr. Evan Torner  
Private Citizen

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Evan Torner, and I have served as a professor of German and Film & Media Studies at the University of Cincinnati for 11 years. In addition, I direct our undergraduate program in German and now serve on the German Studies TAG committee for the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. This testimony does not represent the University of Cincinnati, but rather my own views as a private citizen. Although I live and vote in northern Kentucky, my work directly affects generations of Ohioans.

Over the years, I have taught many hundreds of Cincinnati-area students who are now living and working in Ohio. It is a joy to see our alumni employed, raising families, and contributing their best to the state. Students whose degrees I have certified now work in all sectors of the economy: health, law, education, technology, and media. The vast majority of them attribute their foundational successes at the University of Cincinnati to the faculty who work there. At a recent College of Arts & Sciences recruitment event, our current students echoed this sentiment: it is the faculty who prompt them to ask questions, to work hard, to aspire, and to find a path toward their future lives and careers.

Yet recruitment of these faculty is currently imperiled. Simply put: the harsh stipulations of the proposed SB1 / HB6 higher-education legislation crush academic freedom, and are now widely known outside of Ohio. The proposed bill sends a message around the world that a talented scholar need not bother with our state or any of its higher-education institutions, since the state will do more to jeopardize their career than invest in it. In 2016, we had over 40 applicants to a tenure-track position in German, which contrasts with a mere 7 applications for a recent visiting assistant professor position in 2024, after SB83 was on the agenda.

I am serving on a hiring committee for our brand-new BFA in Games in Animation program, which welcomed over 70 students into its initial cohort this past fall. We have at least three times as many student applicants for the program as there are spots for the class of 2029 cohort. The program is growing, and the existing talent pool in the games industry is quite large. Nevertheless, it has proven difficult to attract high-quality talent to apply for the 3 different full-time positions in Games and Animation that we have advertised. SB1 / HB6 is frequently mentioned by prospective candidates, who represent top game design programs

at the University of Southern California, Northeastern University, and New York University, among others, as a reason why they will not apply for a job in Ohio.

The clear attempt by SB 1 / HB 6 to silence evidence-based science and voices of marginalized populations now directly impedes our faculty recruitment. The bill threatens academic freedom and, if passed, will mark an era in which we will not only be unable to find talented colleagues to work in Ohio, but also much of the faculty will leave the university due to the possibility of being censored, harassed, or worse. If those faculty are not at the University of Cincinnati, who will teach our students? A high-quality public-university system with engaged faculty and students has long been a guarantor of Ohio's prosperity. Why needlessly threaten that, when the results will be felt for generations?

Thank you for your time.

Dr. Evan Torner