

Testimony of Alexandria Wilson-McDonald, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 10, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Alexandria Wilson-McDonald. I am an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Otterbein University. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6 as an academic, educator, and concerned citizen. My beliefs described below are my own and do not represent those of my employer.

My positionality as a political scientist, academic, and educator informs my strong opposition to SB 1 and provides me with a unique perspective on the bill. While there are many problematic issues to consider with regard to this bill, I will focus on one in my testimony and that is the problematic nature of the extremely broad language and categories contained within the bill defining “controversial beliefs.” SB 1 defines controversial beliefs as “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion” (p. 21). It requires institutions to affirm and declare that faculty and staff will allow students to “reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies and shall not seek to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious point of view” (p. 24). As it currently stands without this bill, students *are* free to reach their own conclusions and beliefs about any policy presented in the classroom. Students can walk out of any classroom and believe whatever they like, rendering this bill unnecessary. Regardless of what students ultimately think, however, professors have a professional and moral obligation to provide information that is factual in the classroom. For example, while I can and *do* entertain various policy perspectives in the classroom grounded in the academic literature, I, as an educator cannot entertain blatantly incorrect information as it would go against professional ethics, my moral convictions, and be a disservice to all the students in the classroom. I will draw on an example from my own teaching of comparative and global politics to highlight this. Russia staged a full-scale invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, under the command of Vladimir Putin (Fitzgerald and Davis, “Russia Invades Ukraine: A Timeline of the Crisis,” 2025, *U.S. News and World Report*). Under SB 1, if, in a class in which this war is being discussed, a student falsely states that Ukraine started the war, and the professor corrected that student, the professor could be accused of “indoctrination,” as this discussion could fall under the category of “foreign policy” and the professor, by insisting that students begin their discussion from a factual foundation, could be interpreted as having violated the statement allowing students to “reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies.” However, to fail to correct the student would reinforce false information and preclude the class from having a meaningful debate

about important concepts related to the war such as imperialism, power politics, democracy, and authoritarianism. Instead, the “debate” would surround who started the war, when we already know the answer to this question. This would not only render a discussion of these crucial concepts meaningless given that the factual information that undergirds the discussion would be contested within the classroom, but it could also lead to the classroom becoming a platform for the repetition of Russian propaganda. In other words, the bill does not allow for a professor to correct students or to hold students accountable for their beliefs being rooted in factual information, a cornerstone of academic inquiry. This example highlights *one* of the many ways in which this dangerous bill could negatively affect student learning. For instance, imagine a student denying the current humanitarian crisis in Venezuela precipitated by government corruption led by Nicolás Maduro’s regime. How could the class move onto a discussion of the concept of government corruption, if class time is spent debating the very existence of corruption in Venezuela?

Having classroom debate that is grounded in factual information is crucial in preparing students who are seeking degrees in political science to 1) be well-informed citizens capable of assessing policy and making informed political decisions and 2) provide those students who seek to go into government with the tools necessary for developing, evaluating, and implementing sound policies. Entertaining falsehoods in the classroom is not only dangerous, it prevents educators from properly equipping students who are obtaining degrees in political science for future governmental work or even graduate study and prevents all students from learning how to respectfully engage in meaningful political debate. This prevents Ohio’s public institutions of higher education from meeting the statement required in Sec. 3345.0216 of the bill, “The institution declares that its duty is to equip students with the opportunity to develop the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, *informed* conclusions” (p. 21, emphasis mine). Students cannot come to informed conclusions if professors are required to entertain false information in the classroom. Not only would this prevent students from being informed citizens through their classroom education, undermining the effective functioning of democracy overall, but removing meaningful discussion of political topics and policies, including those listed in the bill as “controversial beliefs” from the course material, would render a degree in political science from a public institution in Ohio effectively meaningless as students were not allowed to learn about policies and governmental processes, to grow in their critical thinking skills, and become informed citizens.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful and destructive bill to higher education in Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

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