

February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ruth Hardy. I am a constituent in Anderson Township. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Among the many very concerning aspects of Ohio SB 1 - such as strictures on tenure, the right of faculty unions to strike, and scholarship programs that are so important to thousands of Ohioans, the one that disturbs me the most is the restriction of discussion of so-called "controversial beliefs".

While, on the one hand, SB 1 requires intellectual diversity to be demonstrated, on the other, ironically, it restricts the teaching of "controversial" subjects defined as "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy" including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, immigration policy, and yes, diversity. It also prohibits any diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) orientations, training, offices, or departments, and bans classes, curriculum, and/or reading materials that focus on understanding the history of, or cultural contributions of, certain groups or communities.

How is that not restricting intellectual diversity? Increasing knowledge and understanding of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, cultures, abilities, thoughts, and opinions among fellow citizens is a civic virtue and the path to creating a more peaceful and productive society. It should be a major goal of higher education.

SB 1 also requires student evaluations to consider ""Does the faculty member create a classroom atmosphere free of political, racial, gender, and religious bias?" But how will students know what bias consists of when they will be prevented from learning about and discussing it? And the "Retrenchment" clause will likely terminate classes that Trustees deem "too controversial" – i.e., those in which the history or examination of topics concerning "political, racial, gender, and religious bias" might be explored.

Just as students need opportunities to broaden their grasp of critical issues, the wider community also must have more opportunities to thoughtfully discuss these issues among their fellow citizens, and with their representatives. Whether it be in the form of community forums, coffees or district town halls, we need more opportunities to better inform ourselves by listening to differing views from the scientists, educators, state representatives, parents, elders, business community, citizens with disabilities, and workers from all sectors and cultures in interactive settings before we reach final conclusions about momentous bills such as Ohio Senate Bill 1.

Otherwise, we risk perpetuating the echo chambers we are all heir to.

Please OPPOSE sending Ohio Senate Bill 1 to the full Senate for a vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.