

My name is Neely McLaughlin, and I am an associate professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash College, a regional campus of UC that focuses on bringing excellent educational opportunities to a wide range of students. In my personal capacity, I offer this testimony against SB1.

As I considered SB 1, and why thoughtful and reasonable people would support it, I identified a serious misunderstanding on the part of proponents of SB 1 about what actually happens in higher education. SB 1 understands faculty and institutions of higher education as a whole as pursuing political indoctrination. This is simply not the case.

My colleagues and I bring our expertise in our disciplines and in teaching to our students to further their professional and personal growth. As my students read, write, and analyze, I provide opportunities and feedback to help them think through their perspectives so they are prepared to bring their perspectives, skills, and ways of thinking into increasingly complex situations. My students and my colleagues alike are far from monolithic in our opinions and experiences. Higher education provides a way to engage with our differences, to engage with the ideas and opinions of different experts in different disciplines. Faculty with expertise in those disciplines are equipped to handle complex topics in their fields and to address differences of opinion about concepts; the state government is not so equipped, and is intruding into higher education via SB 1. This legislation creates a chilling environment for debate, discussion, and exploration of complex topics. For example, the discussion of controversial ideas combined with the provision of SB 1 about publishing course and faculty information constitutes an implicit threat of harassment at a level I hoped never to see in the US.

As I read the provisions of SB 1, I remembered what it was like for me to teach as a visiting professor in China. I was warned that government oversight extended into my class, and to be aware that students knew this; I was also told to teach the course as normal. I was teaching American literature that brought American religious history, and political ideas like free inquiry and civil rights, into the course. It was not possible to teach this course as I normally would with the knowledge that my students and I were not truly free from government threats. The intrusion of government into the higher education classroom made open discussion and debate about many controversial aspects of this American literature impossible. Students would meet me outside of the class, one-on-one or in small groups, to bring up ideas and questions that they did not feel safe and free to bring up in the class. Many were amazed at the level of religious and political freedom and the openness of political dissent in the literature we were reading. I admired their dedication to free debate under these adverse circumstances and returned to teaching at UC Blue Ash with appreciation for our diversity of ideas and freedom to debate them. It deeply concerns and saddens me to see Ohio undermining that freedom through government intrusion into higher education.

SB 1's restriction of academic freedom, due process, and collective bargaining rights for professors is a disturbing example of government interference that does not align with our values as a nation. It will hurt Ohio immediately upon implementation and long term. I urge you to oppose SB 1.

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