

Testimony of Savanna Wooten
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Savanna Wooten, and I am a graduate teaching associate in musicology at Ohio State University, where I have attended and taught for 2 years. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am a Ph.D student researching the history of jazz with respect to race, gender, and power structures. As someone who is deeply engaged in the study of music and its vital role in our cultural, intellectual, and social life, I am gravely concerned about how this bill will negatively impact my education, my students, and the broader music community within Ohio's higher education institutions.

Music, as an academic discipline, is not just about performance and theory, but about cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence, which are crucial to the development of well-rounded individuals and informed citizens. The provisions in this bill that seek to limit funding to public universities and restrict the resources available to creative and performing arts programs would undermine the ability of graduate students like myself to continue our work and contribute meaningfully to our communities and to society at large.

As a graduate student in music, I rely heavily on institutional support to develop my craft, pursue research, and perform at a high level. From funding for concerts and recitals to access to libraries, specialized equipment, and faculty mentorship, the resources provided by public institutions of higher learning are integral to my ability to succeed in my studies, research, and future career. As a graduate student in musicology, I rely on assistantships, fellowships, and research funding to support my studies. Further reductions in funding proposed in Senate Bill 1 would exacerbate the financial challenges that I already face as a graduate student. Reductions in funding, as proposed in this bill, would severely limit financial resources, making it difficult or impossible for graduate music programs to provide the level of education and opportunity that students need to thrive. It could also hinder our ability to share our art with the community through performances and outreach, which are vital in connecting the university to the people it serves.

Additionally, music education is inherently collaborative. Graduate students in music often teach undergraduate students, work with peers in ensembles, and engage with faculty to explore new creative ideas and projects. These collaborations contribute to the vitality of our programs and help prepare us for future careers as educators, performers, and professionals in the music industry. The restrictions in this bill threaten to diminish the quality of these

experiences by underfunding programs and stifling the free exchange of ideas and the exploration of diverse musical forms. It limits the ability of institutions to innovate and for students like me to engage with the full spectrum of musical traditions and techniques that are essential to our development as artists and scholars.

Moreover, the bill's proposed constraints on academic freedom are particularly troubling in the context of the arts. Music, as a form of artistic expression, is inherently about questioning, exploring, and challenging societal norms. Restrictions on curricula and the ability to teach diverse and inclusive content would severely limit the academic environment in which creativity and intellectual growth are nurtured. Students in the arts must be able to engage with a broad range of ideas, historical contexts, and cultural perspectives to create meaningful work. This bill's potential to stifle that exploration is a direct attack on the nature of the arts as a vital and dynamic field of study.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to reject Senate Bill 1. As a graduate student in music, I depend on the resources, academic freedom, and opportunities provided by my institution to develop as an artist and scholar. This bill threatens those very elements, and in doing so, it threatens the future of music education and the broader cultural landscape of Ohio. Instead of limiting access to education and stifling creativity, we should be working to support the arts and higher education, ensuring that all students have the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Savanna Wooten
Graduate Student in Musicology
Ohio State University