

Testimony of Dr. Ashley Hope Pérez, PhD  
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2023 OSU Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award Recipient

## OPPONENT TESTIMONY ON SB1

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

My name is Ashley Hope Pérez, and I am an associate professor at The Ohio State University. I do not speak on behalf of OSU but rather as a parent and private citizen who opposes Senate Bill 1.

I have many concerns about this bill, and I urge the committee to vote against it. I am committed to public education, and until now, I assumed my own sons—aged 14 and 9—would attend public universities in Ohio. But SB1 undermines every Ohioan’s right to an effective and complete education. It also endangers students’ competitiveness in a rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup> century professional landscape. It’s not surprising, then, that not a single student from a public university in Ohio has testified in support of the bill.

Although the bill purports to promote intellectual diversity, in fact its effect is to suppress *all* voices and limit meaningful dialogue in classroom spaces so-called controversial issues. The bill disrupts essential opportunities for students to cultivate critical thinking on complex issues.

Why should this worry us? Critical thinking is not a luxury of the humanities but rather a vital resource for competitiveness in today’s job market. AI tools are accomplishing an increasing number of communication and technical tasks formerly performed by humans. This makes our critical thinking capacity—which AI lacks—one of the most essential and marketable job skills that young people can hope to gain in college.

Faculty already encourage intellectual diversity, and they do so while ensuring that students gain essential knowledge and skills. But under SB1, professors risk accusations of “taking sides” any time they introduce students to the key debates and research base in their area of expertise, effectively restricting faculty from modeling or promoting critical thinking in the classroom.

One geology student may find climate change controversial; however, if their professor does not teach it, or teaches it with an emphasis on minority views of the science to avoid being targeted for imbalance, all students in the class receive a subpar education on the issues their future employers will expect them to understand. **This is not intellectual diversity but rather intellectual dilution and distortion.**

SB 1 paves the way to **an Ohio education that can only be counted on to effectively prepare students to think about *uncontroversial* issues.** But in today’s evolving labor market, neither Ohio’s students nor its leaders have room to gamble with the quality of education. Nor do we want to see our brightest students turn away from our public institutions or head out of state for a quality public education.

I ask you to vote “no” on any form of this counterproductive and harmful bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.