

Testimony of **Lynette Phillips**
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11, 2025

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

My name is Lynette Phillips, and I am the parent of a current higher education student in a public Ohio university. I am also a professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at Kent State University, where I have taught for over 14 years. I previously taught at two public and two private universities in North Carolina, Florida, and Ohio, so I bring experience from a variety of higher education institutions. I do not represent Kent State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen and parent in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

My biggest concerns are the seeming lack of understanding in the purpose and goals of higher education behind the crafting of the bill and confusion around the actual impact of the bill's ability to ensure that all students are included with fair and equal access to education. Parents, guardians, and students expect the higher education experience will involve learning general and specific concepts and methods and developing social and critical thinking skills to obtain a good job and be productive members of society. This includes those with learning challenges, with economic hardships, and first-generation college students who have no family experience to help them through the process. Current programs and policies are designed to help every single student succeed, no matter who they are and where they come from. Removing them harms those with the greatest need, constituents in your districts.

Our state population is vast and varied, and limiting discussions on subjectively worded "controversial beliefs or policies" flies in the face of education goals. If we don't talk about matters of importance to Ohio citizens, how can we learn from each other and grow as a society? Who decides what is controversial? Will this change over time? How will this be monitored? The wording in the bill itself is contradictory, stating first that no topic can be covered that is "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" but then saying higher education institutions must "[a]ffirm and declare that faculty and staff shall allow and encourage 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." How does an instructor prevent any discussion of any of those topics but still allow students to reach conclusions without having any information to use for that purpose?

Learning is constantly evolving, and preventing discussions on a topic does not make it go away. In fact, hearing from different viewpoints and newly discovered facts improves our understanding and increases empathy, productive communication, and societal growth. Companies expect applicants to be able to function with equity and in diverse environments, with people who have many different backgrounds and viewpoints. Ohio students will not be able to compete for jobs with these proposed changes. If this bill passes with its current content, there will be far-reaching detrimental effects on application numbers across all Ohio public universities that will in turn negatively impact the state's economy and competitiveness. I implore you all to truly learn what happens in the classroom and see for yourself how damaging this bill will be to Ohio citizens and specifically its students.