

Testimony of William L. MacDonald, Ph.D. and associate professor of sociology
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 Bill MacDonald, and I am an associate professor of sociology at The Ohio State University at Newark, where I have been employed for 32 years. I do not represent Ohio State Newark but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Because of SB1's poor wording, faulty logic, and failure to define indoctrination, professors fear that they will not be able to present or discuss controversial subjects. The fear is legitimate because facts are sometimes controversial. For instance, empirical evidence, logic, and reasoning support the fact that humans evolved from other primates, and that fact has led to the dismissal of creationist and intelligent-design explanations of human evolution. Some individuals, however, believe in such quasi-explanations and reject evidence-based theories of human evolution. That makes the factual matter a controversy, one that has tremendous implications for educational policy.

Does SB1 consider presenting controversial facts as indoctrination? And what does intellectual diversity mean in the context of teaching? Is a professor who ignores discredited quasi-explanations of human evolution and other topics guilty of indoctrination? When I teach about the evolution of human social behaviors, such as marriage, crime, etc., am I indoctrinating students? I hope your answer is no. Professors doing the good work of informing students so they can be good citizens—seemingly the goal of the bill—should not be afraid to present facts. Yet that is what SB1 is doing, and that should be enough to dismiss the bill.

SB1 neither defines indoctrination nor provides any examples of it, so it impossible for professors to know what Ohio's state legislators mean by the term. Without that clarity, implementing SB1 seems impossible. Before voting on SB1, please consider the following:

1. SB1 does not define "indoctrination" in the context of teaching in institutions of higher education. Consequently, anything, including teaching, could be construed to constitute indoctrination.
2. SB1 fails to identify specific concerns and real-life examples regarding indoctrination in the classrooms of Ohio's public colleges and universities.
3. SB1 provides no examples of behaviors, practices, and content (e.g., teaching materials, teaching techniques, etc.) that constitute indoctrination.
4. SB1 provides no guidelines for professors to follow to avoid indoctrinating students.
5. SB1 provides no guidance on presenting controversial facts and helping students to think critically about them.
6. SB1 provides no guidance to teachers for helping students to form their own opinions.
7. SB1 fails to define a review process for teaching materials to ensure they avoid indoctrination.

I thank you for promoting intellectual diversity, and I respectfully ask you to reject SB1.