

Testimony of Corinne Sugino, PhD
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 10th, 2025

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

My name is Dr. Corinne Sugino, and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Center for Ethnic Studies at The Ohio State University. I have been teaching college-level courses for several years and currently teach classes in both English and Asian American Studies at OSU. This letter does not represent The Ohio State University, instead, it represents my personal perspective as a private citizen of the State of Ohio.

I am strongly opposed to SB1 and believe it is a dangerous attack on students, professors, and any other community members who speak out against established hierarchies and forms of injustice. It is a chilling example of the way that conservative legislatures and political elites are attempting to dictate classroom spaces. This is part of a broader history: it is worth noting that the creation of Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and similar programs both across the country and at OSU were only made possible precisely through hard fought collective student demands and struggles for justice. They demanded programs such as these because of the way existing curriculums centered primarily the perspectives of the predominantly white and male “canons” of scholarship while presenting them as universal. This point is important, because it illustrates that education has never been, and cannot ever be, truly “neutral.” The knowledge we create about the world has always been influenced by power, and SB1 is an attempt to shut down discussions on topics deemed unacceptable to those in power.

SB1 is therefore not about intellectual diversity, it is a form of intellectual authoritarianism. It is backlash by those in power, motivated by their own political interests, against generations of students who have had the courage to challenge established hierarchies. SB1 “prohibits” DEI trainings and programs, as well as any “training, office, or position under a different designation that serves the same or similar purposes” (p.22). Yet the bill lays out no clear definition of what “diversity, equity, and inclusion” programs are. Instead, DEI becomes a vague formulation for anything the legislature doesn’t like, it gives them unbridled authority to shut down any ideas, programs, or perspectives formulated in the name of anti-racism, gender equity, or anything deemed “leftist,” including the aforementioned programs. It will disincentivize and target classes that are willing to discuss how legacies of violence like slavery, colonialism, and racism impact the world today because professors would be prohibited from taking a “position” on them as “controversial issues.” It will silence conversations about contemporary and historic racial justice movements. In my own classes in Asian American studies, I cannot see how staying “neutral” on the issue of anti-Asian racism could be ethical, desirable, or even possible. Regardless of whether you agree with these perspectives, the point is that SB1 silences faculty and tells us that speaking

our minds will be met with punishment. How are students supposed to feel empowered to stand up what they believe in when they see faculty being silenced and intimidated? For these reasons, I oppose SB1.

I have had the opportunity to work with many inspiring students. They are brilliant. I am grateful for the opportunity to know them, even if only for a semester. I do not view the classroom as a space where I simply impart my views onto students. They make me think harder every day, challenge my own perspectives on the world, and ask hard questions about equality and justice, including race, gender, and “diversity,” even when those questions feel uncomfortable. I have also been inspired to learn about the students across the state of Ohio that have organized against, spoken out about, or protested SB1 (or SB83 before it). Bills like SB1 make me question why I ever became a professor, but these students help me to remember. They remind me that, despite SB1’s attempts to dictate and police the boundaries of what types of knowledge and learning are acceptable, students have the courage to demand better. So even if you ultimately do not agree with me, I hope that you will listen to them.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.