

Opponent Testimony of Sylvia Snow-Rackley
Senate Bill 1
House Higher Education Committee
February 11th 2025

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

My Name is Sylvia Snow-Rackley and I have been an Ohio resident my entire life. I am a member of the Ohio Student Association and a student at Cuyahoga Community College on the Urban Studies track. I plan to continue my education at a 4-year-institution and I would like to stay in Ohio. If this bill passes, I don't know if I will.

This bill will have the opposite effect of what it says it intends to do and that it will actually DECREASE the degree of "intellectual diversity" and free speech occurring within schools. I find myself particularly concerned about the terminology surrounding the concept of "Controversial Beliefs or Policies".

This semester I took a class on traditional Western Christianity, and one thing we talked about was heliocentrism: the idea that the Earth orbits around the sun, a plain and simple fact. Anyone who would dispute that today would be labeled a fool. In the 1600s however, heliocentrism was a controversial idea. Galileo was persecuted and became renowned among many people for being a heretic; a prohibition was passed against the idea in 1616. And yet years later this model has propelled unparalleled scientific progress in our understanding of the world. I emphatically question the premise that a controversial idea doesn't have a right or wrong— that the truth should be ignored in favor of political ambiguity. This model pushed our world into the scientific revolution, Galileo and Nicolaus Copernicus (the man who originally is credited with teaching heliocentrism) were both teachers, University teachers, and without their fervent pushing of this model today if they had limited their opinions in their teachings for fear of being labeled as heretics or brainwashers, we would not have much of the technology we see today "I think this bill will prevent us from making key discoveries, limit our academic progress, and keep Ohio from moving into the future.

As I mentioned earlier, I am on the Urban Studies track. The histories of Ohio cities are riddled with controversy; they are rich in social, historical, and cultural changes, conflicts, and more. The conversations we have in class are equally rich. I don't want to lose out on my education because my teachers are afraid for their jobs when what they are teaching is historical fact. This is the opposite of free speech: this is censorship, plain and simple. **I refuse to be censored** and refute this attack on *my* free speech and the free speech of my peers and professors.

Conversations about controversial beliefs and ideas are vital to move our society forward. There is no future for Ohio if we silence free thought. Both the vague wording and some of the ideas directly quoted in the definition of controversial beliefs—ideas like climate change—will prevent teachers from freely expressing true ideas, pushing the world forward as they may be afraid of seeming as though they are "inoculating" the

students, even if they are not. Colleges are incredibly impactful on their surrounding cities, states like Ohio and our nation. What is taught in higher ed institutions will impact our entire community. I am concerned that limiting these conversations will limit our collective growth as a society.

Ohio colleges are some of the best in the nation, some of the best in the world. We want to produce leaders and changemakers in Ohio, but to do that we have to equip them with the right tools. If this bill passes, we will be failing our Ohio students, pushing them out of our state to build the culture and economies of states that do not censor its students. . This bill is meant to combat intellectual diversity and weaken Ohio's future. Everything in this bill from censorship to taking away benefits from our teachers who work GOOD UNION JOBS promises to restrict Ohioan's freedom and damage our economy. I urge you to vote no on this bill in order to allow Ohio schools to continue to thrive.

Thank you.