

Testimony of Amy Cruickshank, MA in English
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 Amy Cruickshank, and I am a professor of English at an Ohio community college, where I have taught for 25 years. I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

As a lifelong Ohioan, I have often heard the term “brain drain” applied to our state. Many of our best and brightest leave the state for college or attend one of our great institutions of higher education in state and then move away. In fact, Governor DeWine’s latest budget makes clear this is an issue for him. During a press conference he gave after revealing the budget details, which include a continuation of the Governor’s Merit Scholarship, he said, “this scholarship will continue to encourage Ohio’s best and brightest students to stay in the state of Ohio and go to college. These kids will much more likely then stay in Ohio, get a job in Ohio, be Ohio citizens and be productive members of society.” It’s clear that combatting Ohio’s brain drain is an important priority for Governor DeWine and, I suspect, most of Ohio’s legislators.

SB 1 will do the opposite.

The bill is a solution in search of a problem. Most faculty, including me, already encourage diverse opinions and perspectives while providing a space where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas. As an English professor, I teach students how to argue a position. Of course, I get students who don’t always agree with me and vice versa, but because I am a professional those moments become useful examples about listening to the other side and debating in good faith. Students are not penalized in my class for having differing opinions; in fact, I encourage it. And while I can’t speak for all faculty, I know that most of my colleagues approach controversial topics in their classrooms the same way. We aren’t interested in indoctrination; we value multiple views because that’s how students, and yes, even we faculty, continue to learn.

But SB 1 takes that dynamic and turns it into something potentially suspect, implying that faculty haven’t been professional or open to diverse opinions. Yet, other than a handful of anecdotes, the authors of this bill have provided no tangible evidence of this being a widespread issue. In fact, even students themselves can see right through this obvious attempt at trying to silence views that many members of the current legislative administration don’t support. Students have shown up en masse to protest the earlier version of this bill, SB 83, and were even at the courthouse when it was reintroduced a couple weeks ago. But instead of praising these students for their civic mindedness, for caring about the future of their state and their education, instead of being open to diverse opinions, Senator Cirino said in an interview, “The students that were out here protesting are probably getting extra credit for being here. I don’t believe that they have studied the bill and all the

implications of this legislation and the impact on higher education in Ohio. I believe that they were asked to be here by their professors.”

Patronizing Ohio’s students is not the best strategy for reversing brain drain. And passing a bill that will create more problems than it solves won’t help either.

For the sake of our citizens and our education system, and to ensure we start to reverse Ohio’s brain drain, please reject Senate Bill 1.

Sincerely,

Amy Cruickshank