

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, I address you today as not only a student of public higher education, but as a future public educator. I have numerous concerns about the implications of Senate Bill 1, and its companion House Bill 6. I did not like Senate Bill 83 last term, just as I do not like this bill it's been recycled into.

Controversy is something that should be discussed, but false information is something that should be corrected by things grounded in fact and supported by evidence - scientific, empirical, and otherwise. I do not want people going around believing in untruths, and I do not want professors blamed for an inability to correct these untruths - an inability imposed by those allocating funds. Let us not forget who provides these funds - it is the common people, those paying taxes. The common people do not generally hold ill will against education, and in fact seek it for their own children, if they don't already have it themselves. It is easy to conflate the claims made in this bill as the beginning of a smear campaign against the educated. In America, people are free to be right and free to be wrong - but they do not have the liberty of avoiding correction.

An expert should be allowed to speak on things they know about without pandering to lofty ideas from someone who may have no formal education whatsoever. I've never heard of any opinion spoken about in a class that wasn't defined as such, and given a strict academic purpose for its mention. In the great machine churning misinformation, no professor exists as a cog. I know students stubborn enough to sit and fact check an entire lecture, typing anything and everything a peer or professor may say into Google for the satisfaction of telling them they're a year off (which happened in class last week, as one student claimed that John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1969 - it was 1963. The uproar was incredulous). Falsehood is not given a place in the classroom by a single body that inhabits it.

Colleges are known to be centers for discourse, political activism, and for holding various communities home within one institution. There is a dream attendees have of college, of being able to find their home amongst others. This war on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion threatens the college tradition that attendees seek. I worry that my home I've made will be dismantled. I stand to lose my club, and just when I'm taking a leadership position; I do not want my near future cut off like that by people who would ban us on blanket statements. Nor do I want to deprive the students we serve of the community or knowledge that they receive from us.

I fear classes like my Women's Literature class would be pulled from the roster simply because they have a focus on one particular group. Having a focus isn't wrong. People joined that class to learn about that specific topic - it exists on no lists as compulsory for any program whatsoever. This bill is trying to solve a problem that really isn't there. I believe conversations about our differences are important conversations to be had (especially in the context of education where they can be moderated). People have different experiences, and I don't want us to pretend otherwise. Ignoring these problems doesn't make them go away - it just makes people dumb to reality.

I worry greatly for the rights of faculty and professors. I hope to be an educator myself in two short years, but this field is scarier now than it was when I declared my major. Being a public servant doesn't mean that you should lose civil liberties. Striking, joining a union, and collective bargaining are rights that Americans have fought for, and it would be dishonorable to rescind these rights for a particular class of Americans. Moreover, I worry for the safety of professors. I disagree with the proposition of micromanaging syllabi, or the requirement to make a professor's contact information public - someone who has never entered the classroom would be able to shut it down, and they haven't earned the ability to do that. Some information should stay within the university community. Individuals working in other sectors need not worry about their private information becoming privy knowledge to the public - a lack of security should never be made compulsory for any profession.

Making tenure meaningless is insulting to individuals who have earned their spot in the university - especially when the proposed evaluations are being introduced vaguely and for no discernable reason. This bill is untrustworthy in its vagueness. This shows that it was written by people with no intimate knowledge of the university system or education in general.

I don't agree with our government hoping to sew seeds of distrust among the general public against educators. Educators are not hurting our children, nor are they turning them into a "woke army". Of course, plenty of college students (even ones I know) are still conservatives, and far from "woke". I disagree with the trampling of First Amendment rights, especially of individuals with expert status who are more than qualified to speak on their topics of study. I can very easily see a near future in which this bill is regarded as having been a bad move.

In the real world, no one can choose what they hear, but they do choose what they believe. Burgeoning adults go to college so they might learn how to filter truth from untruth. They are not being indoctrinated in colleges, it is there they learn how to put up walls against brainwash and propaganda. To adopt SB-1 prevents professors from properly teaching students how to be wise and wary. Misinformation feeds AI, pollutes social media, and corrupts rationality more than it ever has before. It is hard to say that SB-1 has any ambition beyond allowing misinformation to thrive and to kill free-thinking. I believe it to be true that many other people beyond myself view this bill as a stumble in the road to liberty and justice for all.

Thank you.