

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify through this written statement. My name is Nicole Willey, and I am an English Professor at Kent State University. I am committed to making sure all of our students succeed to their best ability; therefore, I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1.

For as long as I've been teaching, I have believed in the power of stories to connect people to different times, places, and experiences. Analyzing literature gives students access to worlds they would otherwise never know; it expands their knowledge and it expands their empathy. Critical thinking about ways to address humanity's many issues happens when people learn about a wide variety of people and cultures. The scare tactics being deployed by SB 1 are creating an atmosphere where many faculty (and students) are no longer sure they should be talking about issues and identities they haven't experienced first-hand. It is creating (not helping) self-censorship of students from all backgrounds. And the types of words being targeted (inclusion? Identity? Diversity?) are exactly the words that create a framework that allows for a rich discussion and multiplicity of viewpoints, not to mention a supportive and student success-focused classroom environment. This legislation will shut down critical thinking *and* differing opinions, creating a world in which only certain types of speech are assumed to be allowed. Informing on those who are not following the current orthodoxy will breed mistrust and further curtail freedom of expression and authentic sharing. This atmosphere will not prepare our students for the world they are inheriting, and it will rob us all of beauty and difference. There are many real threats in this bill, (reduced SSI, potential doxing of faculty, the lack of ability to strike), and the slippery zones around what is allowed and what is not is going to lead to targeting of programs and practices that help ALL of our students succeed. Ohio graduates of public schools will no longer be sought after on a global stage, as these regressive policies will narrow, not widen, possibilities for student thinking and growth. The limiting of appropriate words and viewpoints is right out of Big Brother's playbook from George Orwell's *1984*. Those who curtail free speech are never, in the end, on the right side of history.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nicole Willey