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Senate Higher Education Committee
Opposition Testimony on SB 1

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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony opposing SB 1. The Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) represents teachers in traditional public and charter schools, school support staff, library workers, social workers, and higher education faculty and staff, including faculty at four of Ohio's Community Colleges.

Ohio has a world-class system of higher education. Our colleges and universities don't just prepare students for their careers, they also bring life – and an economic boost – to communities across the state, from St. Clairsville to Fremont, Oxford to Kent, Cincinnati to Toledo, and right here in Columbus.

We're not the only game in town though. Other states, including some of our neighbors, have great colleges and universities too. These schools are our rivals on the field, rivals for research grants, and rivals for recruiting talented faculty and students. SB 1 puts us at a severe competitive disadvantage in all of these areas. We ask that you consider and adopt the amendments that are supported by the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors. These amendments will go a long way toward mitigating the downside of this bill.

SB 1, as currently written, is an expensive bureaucratic nightmare, full of unfunded mandates that will force colleges and universities to spend significantly more money on administrative costs and will burden faculty and administrators who are already stretched thin. In response to these extra costs, colleges and universities will be forced to either raise tuition – pricing out more Ohio students – or make budget cuts that will affect everything from academics to athletics to campus safety.

SB 1, as currently written, will stifle academic freedom and lower the quality of coursework. While we understand the expressed intent of this bill is to promote intellectual diversity, we fear that it will have the opposite effect. By legislating how certain topics, including anything that could fall under the vague category of a “controversial belief or policy,” are taught, this bill will have a chilling effect that leads some faculty to omit important content from their courses out of fear that one student could be offended and make a complaint that threatens their livelihood. It could also lead faculty to bend over backwards to include an opposing viewpoint, even when that opposing viewpoint is vile or factually incorrect.

A plain reading of the bill would support the conclusion that if you teach about the Holocaust, you have to teach about Holocaust denial; if you teach about the civil rights movement you need to give Bull Connor and Martin Luther King equal time; and if you teach about biology and medicine, you have to give pseudoscience as much weight as peer reviewed studies. I

understand that this is not the intent of the bill, but this is what the bill seems to dictate. In addition to the costs mentioned earlier, colleges and universities will also have to set aside a hefty legal budget to deal with the inevitable litigation to define what this bill really requires.

SB 1, as currently written, will make it hard to retain talented faculty. If passed, SB 1 would be the legislature's biggest attack on collective bargaining since SB 5 in 2011. It would limit what topics faculty can bargain into their contracts and it would deny them the right to strike. These anti-worker attacks are on top of the uncompensated extra work, the vague directives about "controversial" content and "intellectual diversity," and a new, more onerous system of faculty evaluations. Why would any faculty member – regardless of where they fall on the ideological spectrum – stay here or move here if they had a choice between working in Ohio or another state?

SB 1, as currently written, bill will push more Ohio college students out of state. Students are the consumers of higher education, and I urge you to listen to what students want when they testify. When I listen to them I hear them say they want lower tuition, not bloated bureaucratic costs, and they want honest and free academic discussions, not a big government mandate on what can be discussed in class.

We need to keep Ohio's institutions of higher education competitive, and to do that, we urge you to consider and adopt the amendments that were submitted by the Ohio Conference of AAUP.