

OPPOSITION TO SB 1 BILL:

Dear Members of the Ohio Senate,

I am writing to you today as a deeply concerned educator, citizen, and advocate for the future of Ohio's public higher education system. My name is Tina Patel, and I am an Associate Professor of Interior Design at the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State University, where I have dedicated the past six years to teaching, mentoring, and preparing the next generation of designers and thinkers. While I do not represent Kent State University, I am submitting this testimony as a proud resident and educator of Ohio, urging you to reject Senate Bill 1 in its entirety.

SB 1 is a direct threat to the integrity of education in Ohio's public universities. It undermines the very principles of academic freedom, critical thinking, and intellectual exploration that are the cornerstones of higher education. By attempting to sanitize curricula and suppress discussions on critical issues such as slavery, systemic inequality, and the historical struggles of marginalized communities, this bill would rob students of the opportunity to engage with the full breadth of human history and experience.

As an educator in the field of interior design, I teach my students to design spaces that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of diverse populations. To do this effectively, they must understand the complexities of human experiences—how race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status shape the way people interact with the built environment. SB 1 would stifle these essential conversations, leaving students ill-prepared to address the real-world challenges they will face as professionals. How can we expect them to design for a diverse society if they are denied the opportunity to learn about and engage with that diversity in the classroom?

Furthermore, SB 1 represents an unprecedented overreach into the governance and management of Ohio's public universities. By mandating the involvement of university boards of trustees in faculty hiring and work responsibilities, the bill blurs the line between governance and management, undermining the autonomy of our institutions. This intrusion is not only inappropriate but also dangerous, as it opens the door to political interference in academic affairs. The bill's proposal to replace locally designed teaching and research evaluations with state-mandated procedures further exacerbates this concern, threatening the academic freedom that is essential to the pursuit of knowledge.

The passage of SB 1 would have far-reaching and devastating consequences for Ohio's public higher education system. It would deter talented educators and researchers from working in our state, diminish the quality of education available to our students, and ultimately harm Ohio's ability to compete in a global economy. Employers rely on universities to produce graduates who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and culturally competent professionals. SB 1 would undermine this mission, leaving Ohio's students at a disadvantage in the job market and our state's economy at risk.

As elected representatives of the people of Ohio, you have a responsibility to protect the future of our state's education system. I urge you to stand up for academic freedom, to defend the rights of educators and students to engage in open and honest dialogue, and to reject SB 1. Do not allow political agendas to compromise the quality of education in Ohio.

In closing, I implore you to consider the long-term consequences of this bill. The decisions you make today will shape the future of Ohio's students, universities, and communities for generations to come. Let us not sacrifice the integrity of our education system for short-sighted political gains.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I trust that you will act in the best interests of Ohio's students, educators, and future.

Sincerely,

Tina Patel

Associate Professor of Interior Design

Kent State University

Citizen of Ohio