

February 9, 2025

210N Center for Architecture and Environmental Design
Kent State University
Kent, OH 44240

Kristina D. Roegner, Chair
Senate Higher Education Committee
Senate Building, 1 Capitol Square, First Floor, 142
Columbus, OH 43215

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

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill Number 1 (SB 1). As an Associate Professor of Architecture at Kent State University, I strongly oppose SB 1.

I am dismayed by the overwhelming lack of trust and respect SB 1 demonstrates for the dedicated educators with whom I work every day. Frankly, it reads as a paranoid attempt to monitor and restrict academic freedom to recalibrate the minds of students and faculty. By requiring the posting of “searchable” syllabi and speaker credentials, the “training” of trustees, and the control of expressions of “controversial beliefs,” SB 1 seeks to impose significant government overreach to micromanage the affairs of Ohio’s public universities. In addition to eroding the collective bargaining rights of faculty unions, it would surely chill the critical thinking and questioning that remain essential for the pursuit of academic excellence.

As an expert in curricular and pedagogical development, I can tell you that SB 1 is based on critical misunderstandings of what actually goes on in our state universities. Ohio’s public educators are not the enemy. We routinely go above and beyond to promote intellectual diversity and differences of opinion in every classroom, laboratory, and studio setting with which I am familiar. The extra policing proposed in SB 1, especially within an academic climate that already requires excessive reporting and self-assessment, would take even more valuable time away from the crucial work of classroom instruction and research. Higher education at large has already become bloated with upper-level administrators (Vice Presidents, Directors of Operations, etc.) who have no meaningful contact with students or faculty. SB 1 would exacerbate this trend by increasing bureaucratic demands and decreasing learning benefits.

My experiences in higher education have occurred across a range of states and regions. I earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at world-class institutions in Indiana, Texas, and California; and I have taught hundreds of students at leading architecture schools in California, New York, and Ohio for the past 22 years. I have served on student admissions committees, and I have chaired and served on numerous search committees for administrators, faculty, and staff. From these experiences, I can tell you that today’s academic landscape is national and international in its extent. Competition for students and faculty is fierce. One of the main factors candidates consider when applying for and receiving offers of admission or employment, is to what extent

a university's culture supports academic freedom. If we hope to continue to attract the best students and faculty here in Ohio, we must maintain the freedom to create the most nurturing and challenging learning environments. SB 1 constitutes an imminent threat to the ability of Ohio's universities to excel and remain genuinely competitive within this expanding academic marketplace.

Titling SB 1 as though it "advances" higher education will not fool qualified students and faculty. In fact, if Ohio parents understood the negative impacts this type of policing and unnecessary bureaucratic inflation would have on our children's educations, every one of us would oppose it. This dangerous bill would soon make graduates of Ohio's public universities less intellectually prepared and less professionally competitive with their peers from private colleges and universities in Ohio and public universities in many other states.

It has been my honor to serve as an educator here in Ohio for almost 12 years. My colleagues and I have worked tirelessly to create uniquely effective environments for teaching and research within a competitive national and international context. Please help us to continue this crucial effort by voting "NO" on SB 1 and any other threats to academic freedom that emerge.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions, and I am always available to consult on this crucial issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Yoder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jon Yoder, PhD, Associate Professor
College of Architecture and Environmental Design
Kent State University