



February 10, 2025

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

My name is Greer Aeschbury, and I am the Senior Campaign Manager for Ohio for All Voting is Local Action. Our organization advocates for policies and legislative priorities that expand voter access. We partner with many community organizations, including institutions of higher education to promote the right to vote. I am writing to express our explicit and direct opposition to SB 1, the Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act. This bill would limit students' ability to engage with nonpartisan civic activity and voter engagement. If passed, it will essentially weaken higher education's mission to cultivate informed citizens and harm our democracy by reducing students' understanding of our electoral system and important issues that reach the ballot box.

I will focus my testimony specifically on the part of the legislation that prevents universities from taking a stance on any "controversial subject." Section 3345.0217 states, "'Controversial belief or policy' means any belief or policy that is the subject of **political controversy**, including issues such as climate policies, **electoral politics**, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion."

This broad effort to ban "controversial subjects" is likely to limit higher education institutions' ability to engage students in nonpartisan civic activities, such as voter registration drives, voter education, or candidate and issue education. Electoral politics inevitably includes subjects that the public disagrees on – that's a fundamental part of an electoral democracy. By shutting down colleges' and universities' ability to engage with these subjects, and specifically with electoral politics, the legislature is limiting Ohio students' ability to learn and develop, or express, their own political perspectives. In fact, if a bill like this had been implemented prior to this hearing, higher education institutions wouldn't even be able to advocate for themselves at this very moment. This is a travesty for our democracy, and it is antithetical to the mission of higher education.

Ohio colleges and universities play a pivotal role in educating and preparing students to be engaged, active citizens. Participation in our elections is a cornerstone of civic engagement and essential to a healthy democracy. This role is highlighted in the mission statements of many colleges in the state – from The Ohio State University's "preparing a diverse student body to be leaders and engaged citizens" to Ohio



University's commitment that students "enter to learn, and depart to serve" and the University of Cincinnati's mission to "develop educated and engaged citizens." Colleges and universities have a unique and important role in ensuring students are encouraged and supported in their civic lives.

SB 1 would dangerously limit institutions' ability to carry out their mission and prepare the next generation of Ohioans to engage positively with our democracy. We urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to carefully examine the consequences of such broad prohibitions and encourage you to listen to the students, administrators, and faculty who will be most deeply impacted by this ban and vote no on such a provision.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Greer Aeschbury

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