

Testimony against Senate Bill 1

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Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Deborah Lyons. I have taught in higher education for almost forty years. I am a full professor at Miami University, where I have taught for more than twenty years. The views I express in this statement are my own.

I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it represents unprecedented interference in higher education, undermining academic freedom, faculty governance, and the ability of institutions to prepare students to the highest academic standard. It will make Ohio universities less attractive to prospective students and hinder efforts to hire the best faculty members. It will make it harder for Ohio to keep the brightest young people in our state. It is a warmed-over relic from last year's legislative session where it died for lack of support.

This bill aims to substitute the judgement of politicians for those who train for long years to provide our young people with the best education possible. The restrictions on hiring, tenure protections, and what can be taught will make it impossible to retain high-quality faculty. Using a very skewed notion of intellectual diversity, this bill would exclude from the curriculum a wide range of topics of social importance. If intellectual diversity is to be fostered, all points of view must be allowed, not just those that the legislature finds comfortable. Students need to have the opportunity to confront a range of views, learn how to evaluate them critically, and come to their own conclusions.

The bill is based on an exaggerated notion of the influence that faculty have over students. Even if I wanted to impose my views on my students, it would not be possible. I often struggle just to get them to format their papers correctly! As I reflect on my long years of teaching, I remember some of my favorite students who held views that were well to the right of my own. Despite our differences, we established close relationships and they flourished in my classes. When we did discuss politics, almost always outside of class, an atmosphere of cordial disagreement prevailed. I am quite sure that I never changed their minds and yet I cheerfully gave them the

excellent grades they had earned based on the quality of their work. It would never occur to me to grade a student on anything else! I know that many in the legislature believe that those on the left are bent on political indoctrination of our students, but in fact the overwhelming majority of faculty think as I do, that this is not our job and not why we entered the profession. (I would add that among those very few who do try to force their views in the classroom you are likely to find as many conservatives as liberals.)

The micromanagement of teaching, including the surveillance of syllabi, is chilling and antithetical to the values of a free society. It is also dangerous and can expose both students and faculty to harassment, threats, and even actual violence. In a time when mass shootings are not an uncommon occurrence in schools and universities, it would be the height of irresponsibility to do anything that might stir a disordered mind to action. The changes in the proposed Senate Bill 1 would create a very unappealing atmosphere on campus and damage efforts to attract and retain an educated citizenry in the state of Ohio. I implore you to abandon this misguided and highly undemocratic bill.