

2/10/2025

## **Opposition Testimony for Senate Bill 1**

Submitted to the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on Senate Bill 1. My name is Noah Woods, and I am a practicing public interest attorney residing in Ohio. I originally moved to this state to attend the University of Toledo College of Law, where I actively advocated for students' rights to express their views freely—especially when those views were controversial or unpopular. My own experiences standing up for the right of students to voice support for Palestine and to demand accountability from our institutions reinforced my understanding of the critical importance of free expression and academic freedom.

I previously opposed similar legislation, Senate Bill 83, because of its harmful effects on higher education, and I find myself once again compelled to speak out against SB 1. This bill, masquerading as an effort to promote “intellectual diversity,” is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to suppress speech, stifle critical thought, and dictate the contours of academic discourse in Ohio’s institutions of higher learning. Rather than encouraging open dialogue, SB 1 threatens to create an environment where faculty and students alike are fearful of discussing pressing social, political, and historical issues.

## **The Chilling Effect on Academic Freedom**

SB 1’s language, particularly its broad restrictions on so-called “controversial beliefs or policies,” would establish a climate of censorship. The bill singles out topics such as climate policy, foreign affairs, diversity, and reproductive rights—topics that are central to robust academic discourse. By casting these subjects as inherently controversial, the bill does not foster debate; rather, it seeks to preemptively silence perspectives that lawmakers find inconvenient or uncomfortable.

Ohio’s public universities should be places where ideas are tested and debated, not constrained by the political ideologies of those in power. If enacted, SB 1 will lead to faculty self-censorship, a diminished ability for students to engage critically with the world, and a loss of credibility for Ohio’s institutions in the national and international academic community. This legislation does not protect education; it undermines it.

## **The Attack on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

The bill’s attempt to eliminate DEI initiatives is an overt effort to roll back hard-fought progress toward equity in education. The provisions prohibiting diversity training, removing DEI considerations from hiring and admissions, and barring universities from contracting with entities

that promote diversity are not about ensuring fairness—they are about reasserting historical patterns of exclusion.

As a civil rights attorney, I know firsthand that DEI efforts are not about imposing ideological conformity; they are about ensuring that institutions remain accessible, representative, and welcoming to all students, regardless of race, gender, or background. The notion that such efforts amount to indoctrination is not only disingenuous but dangerous, as it erases the very real barriers that marginalized students continue to face.

## **The Power of the Purse as a Tool for Coercion**

SB 1's provision allowing the General Assembly to withhold funding from universities that do not comply with its restrictions is a blatant attempt to strong-arm institutions into submission. This financial leverage would allow legislators to exert undue influence over academic governance, forcing universities to prioritize political expediency over educational integrity.

Higher education institutions should be accountable to principles of academic excellence and student success—not to the whims of politicians seeking to dictate what can and cannot be taught. By tying compliance to funding, SB 1 seeks to punish universities that refuse to conform to a regressive, narrow-minded vision of education.

## **Conclusion**

SB 1 is not about fostering debate or protecting intellectual diversity. It is about silencing dissent and reshaping Ohio's education system to reflect a partisan agenda. As someone who has fought for students' rights and continues to fight for civil liberties, I urge this committee to reject this dangerous legislation. If Ohio truly values education, free speech, and critical inquiry, it must not allow SB 1 to become law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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A Very Concerned Resident of Ohio