

Testimony of Jennifer Suchland, Ph.D., Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair February 11 , 2025

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

My name is Jennifer Suchland, and I am a professor at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for seventeen years. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I oppose Senate Bill 1 because it threatens to silence education about topics that are often shrouded in silence.

Gender violence feeds on silence. In a society that is afraid to openly talk about the body, gender and sexuality, silence grows and so too the cages of shame that impede healing, justice, and prevention. SB1 threatens to grow that silence by repressing discussions about gender and sexuality by prohibiting discussion of "divisive topics" in college classrooms. What you claim are "divisive topics" are in fact the very ideas and concerns that are finally out into the open. This law does not encourage or protect intellectual diversity -- it is a blueprint to revert to the days when rape was legal, when no one knew or cared to know about human trafficking, or when sexual abuse was treated as a private issue. It has taken decades if not more than a century to challenge the social norms that keep gender violence in the shadows. Sexual violence is protected by social norms that stigmatize sexuality and demean gender diversity. Education is the main way we can prevent violence, and it is instrumental to equipping survivors with tools to name their experience.

Gender violence, like that perpetrated by intimate partners, college wrestling coaches, priests, or human traffickers, flourishes when we cannot research and teach about topics SB1 claims are divisive. By claiming that topics such as climate change, public policy, marriage, or abortion are are divisive and thus "off limits" throws us back into the days of religious authoritarianism when philosophers and scientists were called heretics if their ideas challenged the power of the Church or King. It is an understatement to state that SB1 is not forward looking. It is a regressive lunge backwards that undermines decades of progress fought by the thousands upon thousands of survivors who broke the silence. This bill does not carry the interests of students, educators, or the people of Ohio. Rather, it is an ideologically driven authoritarian overreach into university curriculum.

If we cannot talk about what you claim is divisive, we cannot create safer or more just communities. We cannot talk about prevention or trauma informed care for survivors of gender violence unless we study and educate about gender and power.