

Testimony of J. Brendan Shaw, M.A., Ph.D.  
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner,

February 11, 2025

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

My name is D. J. Brendan Shaw, and I am a professor of English at Central State University, where I have taught for eight years. I do not represent CSU but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I am also the president of the Central State's chapter of AAUP.

As a faculty member at a historically Black college (HBCU), I feel that Black history and culture are central to the courses I teach, and this bill sets up a situation in which I might be forced to not fully honor that rich history. I understand college as a space where young people learn how to think critically and form their own opinions – often by engaging in debate on contemporary issues and coming to their own conclusions. By stifling the ability to discuss current and controversial issues in a controlled academic context, I believe my students will be less able to express themselves and come to their own decisions on important issues that they will face after graduation when they enter the workforce. I teach courses in African American literature, women's literature, and gender and sexuality studies. Consistently students tell me that these classes open up different perspectives and allow them to access viewpoints they hadn't previously encountered. I have had social work students tell me that reading books by diverse authors helped them be better able to work with their clients. My students in the introduction to gender and sexuality studies were better able to make their own decisions about how to feel about the ongoing news about changing ideas about how people identify. Often students (and lawmakers) mistakenly assume that classes on identity are about imposing a limited ideology on students, but on the contrary, I encourage healthy debate on these issues after ensuring my students are informed. I don't think anyone can make an informed decision on any issue without understanding it critically. My introduction to gender and sexuality studies course opens with a clear statement that students are required to learn the concepts presented in the course (as they do in any class), but the class does not require them to adopt any specific political or ideological perspective. I take my job very seriously and I would like the state to continue to trust that I am trained (at Ohio State University) to be the educator that students need to tackle tough topics and become fully informed and critically engaged citizens.

From a labor perspective, I would add that teaching would become more difficult if this bill passes – not only would I be worried about what I could say in the classroom, but the bill also requires extra work from me, work that would take away from my time spent preparing to teach and grading my students. Further, at a time when higher education is consistently losing public funding, the bill adds more work for my institution without any indication of who will pay for the unnecessary oversight added to many steps of the teaching process. This bill costs more money for my institution and yet I don't know where that will come from – and that money will be spent on compliance instead of ensuring the best possible education for our students.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.