

Written Opponent Testimony of Dr. Linda Marie Rouillard, Ph.D., Chair of Ohio Faculty Council
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
Tuesday, February 11, 2025

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

My name is Dr. Linda M. Rouillard, Chair of the Ohio Faculty Council whose members are representatives of Faculty Senates from Ohio public universities and colleges. We are here submitting opponent testimony **to SB1** as the Ohio Faculty Council.

We are concerned about the content of SB1 for numerous reasons. While we appreciate the desire to make higher education in Ohio stronger, this proposed legislation will not do that. Quite the contrary, it will seriously hurt our universities and colleges, and it will harm students.

Our students want and need robust discussions about the full history of our country and that includes not only the progress, innovation, and rights we share as citizens, but also the tragic components of our history. It is in fact our freedom of speech to publicly address our national weaknesses that makes this country so great. It is our willingness to look at ourselves critically and truthfully in all things that allows us to recognize our mistakes and to advance, as well as to celebrate the successes that make our nation a world leader.

SB1 rightly requires institutions to treat everyone equally and provide no advantage or disadvantage with regard to race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression with respect to all positions, policies, programs, and activities. It rightly prohibits statements such as: “one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex. An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.” But the very fact of saying that demonstrates the continued existence of those discriminations. We must admit that and we must realize that we are still living with the consequences of those historical discriminations against non-Caucasians. Those consequences must be addressed and redressed. *“Facts do not cease to exist if they are ignored,”* (Aldous Huxley).

SB1 has serious consequences for workforce development in Ohio. Banning controversial topics from the classroom in the guise of fostering “intellectual diversity” will adversely affect our students’ preparation for jobs in STEM, for instance. If educators cannot address a wide range of current issues and government policies in the classroom, our future nurses and doctors will not know how to address the very real consequences of the high mortality rates of African American women in childbirth; they will not know how to develop new treatments for illnesses aggravated by pollution and climate change. How can future health-care providers even pass state or national board exams or attain licensure? Environmental and civil engineering graduates will be at a disadvantage if they are not educated about climate change. How can our Ohio graduates compete for jobs when “controversial” topics have been banned from their classrooms?

Some may not believe in climate change, but there are green companies looking for homes for their innovations. Why would such potentially lucrative employers come to Ohio if their potential employees can't receive a robust education based on the study of facts that would prepare them for such jobs?

SB1's elimination of DEI training and programs will harm our students with disabilities and neurodiversity. These students sometimes need accommodations of extra time and extra services. After all, if we can offer our student athletes extra services such as mentoring, tutoring and early registration, surely we acknowledge and serve the needs of students with disabilities, but SB1 will outlaw that.

Our veteran students will also be hurt by the elements of SB1. They come to us with advantageous experiences, but sometimes also with physical disabilities and emotional trauma. Passage of SB1 will deny them inclusion on our campuses because they have special needs.

SB1 considers intellectual diversity, or more precisely, opinion, as a substitute for facts. In the name of intellectual diversity, will faculty have to spend a mere 30 minutes of class-time on the facts and documentation of the Holocaust in order to have 30 minutes devoted to those who deny the Holocaust? Will faculty have to gloss over historical lynchings of African Americans because of those who refuse to believe in these facts or because someone might "feel bad" because of these facts?

If the legislature truly wishes to enhance higher education in Ohio, then it will continue its efforts to expand initiatives such as the Ohio Opportunity Grants. It might even consider reigning in the costs of the administrative bloat in our institutions. SB1 mandates will require yet more reports on compliance related to such things as publicly posting syllabi, faculty reviews and evaluations (already done under CBA'a), requiring courses to demonstrate intellectual diversity for approval, to name but a few. This will only add to bureaucratic costs.

The threat of retrenchment of programs will dissuade students from staying in Ohio or coming to Ohio for their education. Why come here if your program could disappear overnight because the party in power decides that program is not consonant with its political agenda? And why would students enroll in Ohio colleges and universities if freedom of speech and academic freedom are outlawed? For that is indeed what SB1 will do if it passes.

Furthermore, SB1 will cost us dedicated faculty who will refuse to invest their careers in a state that constricts academic freedom and freedom of speech, *including the right to strike*. Faculty working conditions are students' learning conditions. Both deserve the best the state has to offer.

Finally, let us remember that last year's SB83 generated enormous opposition. And let us not forget that Governor Kasich's approval of SB5 outlawing collective bargaining in 2011 was challenged and forced onto the fall ballot by over 1 million Ohio citizens. It was then rejected by over 60% of Ohio voters, leading to repeal. SB1 is similarly opposed by the electorate. Since SB1 was introduced less than one month ago, over 37,000 letters have been sent to legislators to reject the bill. (See <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/stop-sb-1hb-6-the-higher-education-destruction-act/>) More opposition is coming. **Please vote no on SB1.**