

Testimony of Chris W. Post, 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 Chris Post, and I am a professor of geography at Kent State University, where I have taught for 17 years. I do not represent Kent State but rather am submitting opposition testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Thank you for allowing oppositional testimony to SB 1. As a Professor of Geography of Kent State University, and holder of a bachelor's degree in social studies education (grades 6-12) I feel I have a unique and useful perspective on several issues SB 1 attempts to assuage.

Looking at the analysis provided by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, several of the issues you attempt to battle are, in fact, non-issues. I worry you have cherry picked a few national events and accused all professors in Ohio of possessing the same attitudes and motivation in our work. For example, I would remind you that the I in DEI stands for "Inclusion." My colleagues throughout the state and I take this mission seriously. And what you are attempting to legislate here is inclusion. My students are welcome to express any opinion they want in class—so long as it is based in logic, evidence, data, and void of denigrating speech that insults the existence or intelligence of any human or group of humans. I have had several students articulate opposing viewpoints in my classes, and yet nobody ever felt they were not given a chance to express themselves freely. In fact, most students tell me they cannot identify my political stance. I believe you would find that the vast majority of higher education classrooms in Ohio experience the same inclusivity this bill nominally aims to ensure.

Second, two other items in this bill already exist in our regular practice. The first is our post tenure annual review process at Kent State. Might I suggest having the Ohio Chancellor of Higher Education ensure that all public higher education institutions in the state implement similar review policies instead of legislating it in this fashion. Likewise, the politically appointed (and not elected) Chancellor—who currently has no experience teaching in higher education—having the power to create student evaluation questions concerns me that those questions may be politically pointed in order to weed out faculty that the governor, chancellor, or legislature do not agree with. This is an infringement on academic freedom and flies in the face of the inclusivity this bill claims to promote.

Another set of legislation in this bill revolves around my right to free speech. Even as a public employee, I maintain the right to free speech and that includes the right to strike if faced with work conditions that I oppose. This is a first amendment issue that would lose in court. So, again, this issue flies in the face of a bill that claims to ensure inclusivity of opinion in Ohio's Institutions of Higher Learning.

Finally, I want to address the college level course on American Civics Literacy. I agree--a course such as this is essential. However, it should be taught in our high school curriculum before students can vote, and not after. As packaged here, it appears to suggest that such a course is necessary to counter the views of faculty, but as my first paragraph outlines, that is not an issue. Perhaps you, as I did, took such a course in high school. That is where such material belongs. Why that has not been the case in Ohio is, frankly, beyond me.

Thanks for your time reading my testimony as a college professor and scholar in opposition to SB 1. In sum, SB 1 infringes on my constitutional rights as an American individual and also infringes on my academic freedom. It assumes my political positionality. I'll finish with two points. I would invite anyone on the committee to my classroom to actually witness my approach to teaching topics that you may think are controversial. I teach honestly, without blame, and always based in evidence and logic, not feelings. Second, I doubt you tell your plumber how to do her job, please do not tell the academic personnel of Ohio how to do ours. We are professionals at what we do and have years of experience teaching and researching in ways to better understand our world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris W. Post', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chris W. Post