

Opposition Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11, 2025

[This testimony and my completed witness slip were submitted to Roegner@OhioSenate.gov via email on 2/10/25.]

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit my written testimony for the February 11th hearing in opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Theresa Ervin; I am testifying as a private citizen and lifelong Ohioan. I am also the parent of a recent college graduate and a current college student.

There appears to be much contempt directed at our youth, especially those in college. A political party's newsletter quote described students concerned about the future of their educations in Ohio as "those young indoctrinated minds of mush." If this is the mindset of the creators of this proposed legislation, it is a matter of grave concern. Many students diligently pursue higher education to improve their future success in pursuit of the American dream. These bright minds are our future and the likely constituents of these elected officials. These are the individuals who will make contributions to Ohio (and beyond) and to society as a whole.

Where is the evidence and/or research that there is an issue of "indoctrination" in our higher education institutions in Ohio? It is unwise and wasteful to devote public monies to pursue a "problem" that is not adequately defined. As responsible decision-makers, we must base our actions on solid evidence, not gut instincts or political agendas. This commitment to evidence-based governance is the foundation of good decision-making and the key to ensuring the best outcomes for our students and our state.

In reading SB1, numerous concepts are being bandied about, including "intellectual diversity." While "intellectual diversity" is defined as "multiple, divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues" in the bill, what does this mean specifically on the ground, in the classroom? Specifically, how will it be operationalized and measured? How will outcomes be determined? Another term mentioned in the bill is "controversial" beliefs, which is defined as "any belief that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage or abortion." Broadly, any issue can be construed as a political controversy.

The creation of an American Civic Literacy course raises concerns. Since the majority of Ohio high school graduates attend colleges and universities in Ohio, wouldn't a better solution be to ensure that students in K-12 are equipped with critical thinking skills and a comprehensive understanding of civic issues? This approach would foster independent thinking and a deeper understanding of civic issues rather

than imposing a specific course that may limit intellectual exploration. Let's do better preparing our K-12 students.

Finally, many of SBI's requirements duplicate the existing structure embedded in higher education for evaluative purposes. Why are we reinventing the wheel? The additional layer of administrative bureaucracy that this bill supplants on Ohio public institutions of higher education will not only stifle academic freedom but also impose a financial burden on taxpayers. How many people will need to be hired to oversee the requirements? This bill creates additional personnel and other expenses that taxpayers and students should not bear.

Please consider my testimony and vote no on this destructive bill. Its potential negative impact on our higher education system is significant, and we cannot afford to let it pass. The future of our students and our state's vitality is at stake. I urge you to take a stand against Senate Bill 1.

Thank you.

Regards,

Theresa Ervin