

Testimony of Shannon L. Christen, MAT, MA  
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 Shannon Christen, and I am an associate lecturer of English and Africana Studies at Kent State University. I do not represent Kent State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Our students do NOT want this bill. SB 1/HB 6 are sweeping pieces of legislation that propose an unprecedented level of political interference and micromanagement into the affairs of Ohio's public colleges and universities.

Throughout the multiple iterations of SB 83 and now SB 1/HB 6, there have been a series of contradictions on freedom of speech, claiming to promote intellectual diversity while simultaneously dictating the manner in which topics can be discussed. It would ban institutions from requiring the types of training and programs that ensure all students, no matter their backgrounds, can succeed.

The untenable mandates in SB 1/HB 6 would shift money, time, and attention from student learning to bloated bureaucracy. It would make it more difficult to attract students and faculty to Ohio institutions; in the long run, Ohio will become even less competitive economically.

Contrary to the misperceptions of state Republican lawmakers, I do not "indoctrinate" students on DEI and "controversial beliefs." My classroom provides a space for all students to think critically, research, write, and speak honestly about all kinds of points of view. In short, SB 1/HB 6 isn't about "intellectual diversity" but actually about pushing a partisan agenda that would ban freedom of thought at Ohio colleges and universities and stifle academic freedom.

We do not need this one-size-fits-all set of mandates from the state when our diverse institutions have already determined what works well for them.

Ohio deserves lawmakers who will work with schools to solve problems such as rising tuition and keeping schools competitive. None of this advances higher education. Instead, this bill uses culture war politics to attack workers' rights and turn campuses into hostile environments for people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized communities. In an effort to score political points, the legislature could do real, irreversible damage to our institutions of higher education.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Shannon L. Christen

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