

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Monica Williams-Mitchell. I am an educator with 40 years experience and a graduate of an Ohio state university. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

These bills completely miss the entire point of education. By outlawing discussion and study of complex “controversial” issues, they attempt to reduce education to a one-size-fits-all factory replication of thoughtless “workers” rather than thoughtful, creative, and innovative thinkers to lead our state forward. It is only in encountering new and different perspectives and ideas, learning where they come from, and then making judgements based on factual information that students truly learn. Restricting discussion of “controversy” serves only to limit inquiry and silence dissent (yes, I know that’s the point).

I teach high school and have for 40 years. Anyone who works with young people could tell you that a major developmental milestone necessary for children to become adults is the formation of their own worldview. Encountering ideas and information that may challenge what they assume to be true allows students to expand their horizons and develop their own set of values. This bill seeks to infantilize students by attempting to shield them from any controversy or idea that is not sanctioned by the state.

Forty years ago when I was on campus I heard sharp criticism about a [foreign] society that sought to control the scope of thought and discourse. I encountered many ideas on the campus of Miami University (believe it or not) that were different from my upbringing. I learned many facts about history, literature, and politics that made me reconsider my viewpoints. Far from harming me, those ideas helped me to discover how to strengthen the thinking ability of my students and take my place as a voting citizen. How far we have fallen if we think today’s young people are unable to handle any challenge to their upbringing.

I’d like to say one more thing about the bill regarding the strictures it puts on professors and the students’ ability to target and punish professors whose ideas they don’t like, or whose classes they find challenging. Creating this atmosphere of over-caution, fear, and apprehension will do much to stifle new thought, scholarship, creativity and innovation on campuses across the state. No one wins when that is the case.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill.