

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Michael Piero, and I am an English professor at an Ohio college as well as a lifelong Ohio resident.

I write today in **staunch opposition to Senate Bill 1**. Like similar legislation that failed Ohio (e.g. SB 83), SB 1 represents an unprecedented overreach into higher education, one that thoroughly undermines academic freedom, faculty governance, public education, and the ability of institutions to prepare students to enter the workforce well-equipped.

This bill places arbitrary restrictions on faculty hiring, limits tenure protections, and forces a distorted definition of intellectual diversity that would hinder evidence-based teaching. To be clear, the point of tenure is not simply “job security” for professors; tenure is a crucial element that protects educators from political interference and, as such, is **integral to a democracy**. By weakening tenure, SB 1 makes institutions of higher education vulnerable to political interference *from any political party in power*. I would contend that SB 1 intentionally undermines democracy for political advantage, but regardless of intent, this would be the effect if enacted. SB 1 goes further by attempting to micromanage course syllabi, monitor faculty for ideological conformity, and eliminate vital diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that create more accessible and equitable learning environments. This is yet another chapter in an ongoing assault on Ohio’s experts and professionals in fields like education, medicine, psychology, and social work drawn up by representatives without the expertise to make informed decisions on these policies. Indeed, this bears all the markings of a government takeover of higher education for political purposes, an attack on one of the most democratic institutions we have in this state: a public education system free from political interference. **SB 1 would compromise Ohio’s colleges and universities as places of free inquiry driven by research rather than political alignment; in short, SB 1 would infuse political propaganda into our colleges and universities at levels seen in only the most totalitarian states and regimes.**

SB 1 promises to create an adversarial relationship between students and faculty by encouraging students to find flaws and report faculty, essentially invalidating faculty tenure and academic freedom. Faculty should not report to students; they report to their Deans, their Provost, their colleagues, and their field. There is plenty of oversight already; **don’t make students the enforcers of an ideological war that SB 1 prompts and codifies**. That’s not what students should be focusing on while in college, and existing processes are in place to address student concerns and complaints. SB 1 also ignores the fact that institutions, including my own, have always had a regular and rigorous pre- and post-tenure faculty evaluation procedure in their contract by mutual agreement. Moreover, that procedure allows for due process; SB 1 strips faculty of due process and substitutes an atmosphere of continual fear, which negatively impacts faculty mental health, productivity, and innovation.

Most troublingly, SB 1 threatens institutional funding based on vague ideological metrics. By dictating how and what we teach, this bill would weaken Ohio’s ability to attract top-tier educators and students. Why would companies like **INTEL** and **HONDA** want to expand operations in Ohio when its colleges and universities are being attacked, intimidated, and prevented from letting their expert faculty do their jobs? The long-term negative impacts on

Ohio's workforce would be extreme, and **SB 1 would stifle workforce development and community enrichment in Ohio.** As a father, I can tell you that I am already strongly encouraging my child to attend university out of state to ensure an education free from political meddling. How many other families will send their kids out of state, and how many of those students will leave Ohio permanently as a result? SB 1 would create a "brain drain" in Ohio that would foreclose a future of innovation and economic security for many sectors.

The success of Ohio's higher education system depends on intellectual freedom, not political mandates. As someone who studies and publishes internationally in peer-reviewed journals on American culture, literature, history, and sovereign power, I am so thoroughly alarmed by this Orwellian bill that attempts a political coup over higher education institutions under the thinly-veiled guise of "reform." Combined with the recent manipulation of the Citizens' Petition that became Issue 1 and ongoing illegal gerrymandering, such actions point to a consistent effort among Republicans in the Statehouse to keep power, avoid accountability, and replace our democracy with an authoritarian state. Such overreach of power undermines the rule of law and the very foundations of our democracy—it cannot be allowed. **We may not agree on every issue, but safeguarding the cornerstones of a democracy—education and voting rights preeminent among them—should be something we all protect. If you agree, you must oppose SB 1.**

I urge you to oppose this bill in the interest of our students, our institutions, and the future of Ohio's workforce. Please stop the attacks on Ohio's educators. We have important work to do, and living under constant threat and attack makes a challenging job all the more difficult. **Ohio and its schools face real challenges that need your attention, not invented "straw man" issues that rile up one's electoral base nor politically-motivated mandates that overwrite Ohio's doctors, scientists, researchers, and experts—the very people the Statehouse depends on for expert testimony and guidance, the very people to whom they trust their children's education.**

Ohio's schools face serious challenges that we rely on our representatives to sort out, not this "culture wars" nonsense. We have a critical teacher shortage. We have decades of unconstitutional school funding, further compounded by the recent Republican-driven Ed Choice K-12 school voucher program and additional language in SB 1 that would loosen regulations on homeschooling and nonpublic schools (with the obvious intent of expanding religious-based Christian education in Ohio at the expense of a public education system free from religious influence, a plainly unconstitutional and totalitarian endeavor). We have students in some areas being left behind due to lack of wraparound services. We have ongoing literacy problems that leave our students ill-prepared for the workforce. We have an ongoing mental health crisis among our students. **Don't give us political rhetorics masquerading as reform; give us reading specialists and other resources to support all our students at every college and university in the state.**

SB 1 is bad for Ohio students and educators. SB 1 is bad for Ohio colleges and universities. The only people who stand to benefit from SB 1 are politicians who want to remain in power, who want to undermine public institutions like public education, and who want to push religious-based education in public schools. Ohio's higher education system needs reform. We are eager to

collaborate on such reforms, but we will not stay silent as these assaults on our profession and our democracy continue.

Michael Piero, Ph.D.