

Dear Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Ben Morgenstein and I am a professor of English at an Ohio community college. I stand in firm opposition to Senate Bill One because it would create an expensive bureaucracy to address a “problem” that does not exist while seriously damaging the quality of education in Ohio for potential students. The cost to taxpayers from implementing this program and the resulting exodus of faculty and students would be staggering.

The bill frames education as an adversarial relationship between faculty and students, that students must be protected from indoctrination. The absurdity of this framing would be quickly apparent if any of you actually witnessed mine or my colleagues’ teaching. A vast majority of our students are happy to be in college. If you speak to our students, it would be clear that we already “encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies.” Are you also going to introduce bills requiring painters to paint houses or businesspeople to conduct business? The wasteful government overreach of this bill will impose an undue administrative burden on administration and faculty at the many prestigious institutions in this state who are already effectively doing their jobs.

The language of Senate Bill One is vague and could easily be weaponized against almost any professor trying to effectively teach students. Our simply discussing religion, politics, economics, or even aesthetics could be seen by some students as pushing a “social, political, or religious point of view.” Even though we allow free expression on these topics, a very small minority of students and parents on both the left and the right feel these issues should not be discussed. This bill creates a tattletale culture, empowering this small minority to shut down open, thoughtful discussion that benefits the vast majority of students.

Micromanaging of faculty and institutions will make us a national laughingstock and lead to the same issues that occurred in Florida after similar bills were passed. The Guardian reported in July 2023 that “Ron DeSantis’s slew of laws attacking teaching of race and gender issues sees state’s colleges struggle to fill faculty posts.” When this happens, enrollment drops follow, costing the state tuition dollars and leading our most promising young people to flee the state for colleges that don’t have to deal with these kinds of bills.

For the sake of our citizens and our education system, please reject Senate Bill One.