

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to Ohio SB1. As a professor with over 30 years of teaching experience, this bill is the biggest threat to academic freedom and diversity that I have encountered.

This bill places arbitrary restrictions on faculty hiring, and limits what topics we can negotiate in our contract. And while faculty will be evaluated top down (from administrators) and bottom up (from students) no other groups at the institution have such restrictions. SB1 promises to create an adversarial relationship between students, administration and faculty by encouraging students to find flaws and report faculty. The bill also ignores the fact that most institutions already have processes for faculty evaluation that are agreed upon by the university body at large.

Furthermore, it forces a distorted definition of intellectual diversity that could hinder evidence-based teaching, and make students less comfortable in the classroom (the opposite of its stated intention). As someone who teaches in a multi-cultural classroom, I could be limited in my ability to create an equitable and comfortable learning environment since the bill creates nebulous categories of topics considered forbidden, and eliminates vital diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that create more accessible and equitable learning environments.

The bill seems to be based on the mistaken belief that college professors are of one liberal mindset and are attempting to subvert political discourse by silencing conservative voices. The bill's restrictions illustrate how little connection these fears have with reality. Senator Cirino, sponsor of the bill, has refused faculty invitations to actually observe classes to see how faculty respect differing views and offer a safe space for critical discussion. I am reminded of the ill-fated SB5 that precipitated 2011's Ohio Issue 2. At that time Ohio voters said a strong NO to Governor Kasich's endorsement of that anti-labor law. State lawmakers in the Ohio Statehouse seem obsessed with disenfranchising the working class and creating a "right to work" state, and breaking the spirit of intellectual discourse.

In order to "right" this perceived wrong the bill punishes faculty by micromanaging course syllabi, and limiting intellectual freedom. Most troublingly, it threatens institutional funding based on vague ideological metrics. By dictating how and what we teach, this bill weakens Ohio's ability to attract top-tier educators and students. The success of Ohio's higher education system depends on intellectual freedom, not political mandates. I urge you to oppose this bill in the interest of our students, our institutions, and the future of Ohio's workforce.

Sincerely,

Kirsten M. Windahl