

Good afternoon, 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 Laura Rushton. I came here today from Strongsville. I am a retired elementary school teacher who taught in both public and private schools in Richland County. I also served on the board of Foundation Academy in Mansfield for 7 years. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Academic freedom is essential for our public institutions to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. While the state has a role to play in setting broad guidelines, the degree of oversight required by SB 1 is intrusive. A combination of new online reporting mandates and policing of controversial topics takes away time and attention necessary for research, advising, evaluating and planning. Those are the demands a faculty member must meet to ensure that every student is being challenged and supported in their intellectual development. As an Ohio taxpayer, I have invested in public education because I want young adults to have the critical thinking skills to respond to 21st century challenges. They need to be able to base conclusions on evidence, not politically controlled agendas. I take pride in our tradition of academic excellence that has led to groundbreaking research, technological achievements, and well-respected institutions like the Ohio State University, among others, that should remain affordable and open to students of different backgrounds. I beg you not to put Ohio's reputation in jeopardy by taking away their independence. Please vote no on this harmful bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.