

Testimony of Victoria Paige, M.A.

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 2, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Victoria Paige, and I am a PhD candidate in History at The Ohio State University. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

This bill claims to “restore and ensure” academic freedom, preventing indoctrination of any social, political, or religious point of view. This is a worthy cause. However, the provisions in this bill would have the opposite effect, restricting the ability of teachers and students to freely explore ideas without the threat of retaliation. SB1 would require professors to post their course syllabi on a publicly accessible web site. This provision not only adds another layer of work to instructors and professors, time that would be better spent actually working with students and contributing to the research that our public universities are known for, but it seems to be primarily intended as a means to allow a quick and easy way for the public to harass and intimidate faculty for discussing any topics, concepts, and histories with which they might disagree. I am not sure why anyone would want to encourage such attacks on public university faculty. Perhaps, the supporters of SB 1 believe that by making syllabi publicly available, they will finally be able to point to the sections where students are made to adopt the viewpoints of their professors. After four years of being a student and a teaching assistant at Ohio State, I can testify firsthand that such sections do not exist.

Indeed, students in history classes are already encouraged to develop their own opinions, by looking at primary sources and by learning a variety of viewpoints. The language in SB 1, declaring that “faculty and staff shall allow and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies,” assumes that we do not already do this. Moreover, the language in SB1 would require extremist neutrality, forcing faculty to entertain all sides of controversial subjects as though they are equally valid, in fear of losing their positions or university funding. These would mean entertaining conspiracy theories, like climate change denial, Flat Earth theory, and denial of the Holocaust. As academics, we are meant to correct such misunderstandings, not to support them.

SB 1 would also effectively ban all diversity, equity and inclusion offices, training, orientations and scholarships on college campuses. Such broad language threatens essential departments on campuses, including Women’s studies, LGBTQ studies, and Black studies. These programs were instituted after decades of struggle and protest, and banning them from college campuses would not only be a disservice to students and faculty, but to the intellectual prowess of the state of Ohio. Thanks to these scholarships, students who are already underrepresented in universities, are able to more easily achieve an education from the great public universities of Ohio. Eliminating these scholarships would only harm current and potential students. In his sponsor

testimony, Ohio State Senator Cirino stated that this bill is about “creating an environment of “continuous improvement.” Banning these programs and scholarships is not improvement; it is a step back to a past that did not value our students, diversity, or academic freedom.

In his testimony, Mr. Cirino also stated that this bill is “about the core value that students come first.” In fact, students overwhelmingly do not support this bill. Not even a single student from a public university in Ohio testified in support of the bill. If you pass this bill, you are showing that students do not come first; that you do not support what students want. By forcing administrative redundancy into our academic institutions, by banning key departments and scholarships, this bill will encourage students to attend out-of-state universities, threatening to cause a brain drain in the state of Ohio. We are already seeing this in states where similar higher education bills have passed, such as Florida and Texas, where potential faculty and students are choosing to take positions and attend schools in other states. Even the proposal of this bill in Ohio, and its past iterations, have caused concern in potential students. In the history department, for example, I know that we have already lost prospective graduate students due to SB 83, because they were concerned that if such a bill passed, their education would not be valued after graduation.

I have had the great opportunity to attend Ohio State University, where I have earned my master’s degree and where I am working to earn my doctorate. I decided to attend this university due to the wonderful historians and faculty who work here, who encourage a diverse range of thought and opinion, and who value their students and their education. Studying here and working with undergraduate students has been a life-changing experience. If such a bill had existed when I was applying to graduate school, however, I am not sure I would have made the decision to attend here. If SB 1 passes, I am concerned that it will force students to reconsider applying or attending public universities in this state. This would be a huge disservice to Ohio and its institutions. For these reasons I strongly oppose the passage of this bill. Please feel free to ask me any questions.

Sincerely,
Victoria Paige
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