



Jaime Miracle, Deputy Director  
Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 1  
Tuesday February 11, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education committee, thank you for accepting my testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Jaime Miracle. I am the Deputy Director for *Abortion Forward*, formerly Pro-Choice Ohio, a statewide organization that champions policy changes and mobilizes activists to protect abortion rights and bodily autonomy. I am submitting this testimony today on behalf of our staff, volunteers, and supporters across the state, because all students deserve an education which is in-depth, rigorous, and not a stifled shell because of censorship from the Ohio State Legislature.

Sponsors and supporters of this bill talk about “free speech” and “intellectual diversity” but this bill shows just how unserious legislators are about supporting it. One of my favorite movies is *The American President*. In a speech at the end of the movie, President Andrew Shepherd talks about free speech and our American democracy. “America isn't easy. America is advanced citizenship. You've gotta' want it bad, 'cause it's gonna' put up a fight. It's gonna' say, 'You want free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil, who's standing center stage, and advocating at the top of his lungs that which you would spend a lifetime opposing at the top of yours' ... Now show me that, defend that, celebrate that in your classrooms.”

This might be a fictional scene of a fictional presidency, but it is a perfect illustration of why free speech is a fundamental building block of the American democracy. It gives no special weight to one point of view or another. It encourages discussion, it encourages debate, because discussion and debate of disparate viewpoints makes us strong. Hearing different points of view helps each of us decide where we stand on an issue. Sponsors of this bill say they believe in these things, but the details of this bill show that the opposite is true. You cannot stand up for just the speech you agree with. You cannot just protect certain viewpoints while simultaneously punishing others and claim you believe in free speech. S.B. 1 does exactly that – protect speech that conservatives agree with while punishing institutions of higher education and professors and instructors who don't proscribe to those beliefs.

Imagine a physics professor teaching an introductory class and talking about the gravitational constant and how that impacts the acceleration of an object rolling down a ramp. Gravity is just a “theory” right? What happens when a student takes the exam

on this subject and decides to not use the gravitational constant because they don't believe in the theory of gravity. The professor, of course, marks the answer wrong, but the student files a complaint because their viewpoint that they don't ascribe to the theory of gravity was not reflected in their grade in the course. This sounds nuts right? But this is exactly what this bill does. It directly interferes in intellectual rigor and subject area expertise to push a singular conservative viewpoint.

I urge the legislature today to listen to the voices before you. Listen to the dedicated educators who want to teach without dictates and mandates from legislators who are not issue area or educational experts. Listen to the students who want to learn about diverse viewpoints and "controversial topics" that will be stifled by this bill – medical students like Celine Rajoulh and Taseen Alam, who spoke out about the dangers of this bill last legislative session. These students emphasized that banning DEI and "controversial" topics will harm the patients they serve. They said, "The prospect of visiting a doctor's office is already intimidating. Now imagine the added anxiety of dealing with a medical team that is completely out of touch with your background and experiences. Our dedication to representation is not driven by political agendas but by an earnest desire to create an environment where patients can safely seek care without fear of judgment or condescension."<sup>1</sup>

Ohio's infant mortality rate continues to be a crisis – even more so for Black babies who die at a rate 2.4 times higher than their white counterparts. This disparity is just continuing to widen. Racial disparities in health and medical racism might not be an easy or comfortable topic to discuss, but that is the point. Sometimes we must look at the uncomfortable topics to learn the truth. Black babies are dying in our state because of racism plain and simple. Blocking our medical schools from training a diverse cohort of culturally competent medical professionals will just cause this gap to widen further. That must be something that we can all agree is unacceptable, but it will be the reality if this bill is passed.

Let's be real and let's be clear. Let's say what this bill is without false praise about free speech or acronyms that hide the true intent of the proposal. Legislators want to ban diversity, equity, and inclusion from our colleges and universities, all while claiming to care about diverse voices. Teaching a class on women, Black people, or LGBTQ+ history does not equal bias in favor of an individual ideology any more than teaching a class on the history of Christianity forces every student to become a Christian.

S.B 1's approach to "intellectual diversity" is internally contradictory. It mandates intellectual diversity while simultaneously restricting certain types of academic programs and discussions. Beyond this, the bill does not define how "intellectual diversity" would be measured or evaluated, something that appears to intentionally be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2023/09/27/what-impact-would-ohio-senate-bill-83-have-on-student-doctors-patients/70910680007/>

left vague in order to allow the very particular picking and choosing of what should be allowed on an “intellectually diverse” campus. Plain and simple, S.B. 1 would create a needlessly hostile environment for certain academic disciplines. Self-censorship would surely become rampant as professors begin to avoid certain research areas or teaching methods to prevent controversy. We risk degrading the quality of education in Ohio if we do not champion true intellectual diversity, which this bill fails to do.