

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1: Advance Ohio Higher Education Act
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
February 10, 2025

Elle Faris
Private Citizen

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 Elle Faris (She/Her) and I am a recent graduate from the University of Cincinnati (UC). I graduated in December with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies and a minor in Communication. My family was so proud to watch their daughter and granddaughter graduate early from a four-year university as an empowered woman in STEM. To date, I am the only woman in STEM in my immediate family. During my time as a UC student, I served as president of Leaders for Environmental Awareness and Protection, one of UC's largest student-led environmental organizations. To gain relevant work experience, I worked as a Sustainability Communication Intern at a local organization on a women-led team, where I educated others about organizational sustainability and how to have an impact on their local community. I am writing today in opposition and concern to the entirety of Senate Bill 1, as a private citizen of the Greater Cincinnati Area. In no way do I represent the beliefs of the University of Cincinnati.

Like a vast variety of vital perennial plants, I am native to the Greater Cincinnati Area. Though I was not always aware of the important natural processes occurring around us, I always had an appreciation for my region and the beautiful diversity it carried. I grew up with an equal appreciation for the nearby City of Cincinnati and the nature found outside of these urban or suburban centers. Throughout high school, I was an avid participant in environmental organizations, sought AP level environmental education, and gained a growing concern for the impact humans had on our planet Earth. I knew that I wanted to attain my higher education in Environmental Sciences to build upon my understanding of my concerns and greatly valued a balance between hard and soft sciences. After all, a good scientist is one who can do the work and translate it to accessible layman's terms. When graduating high school during the COVID-19 pandemic, my research led me to the University of Cincinnati, the only university I applied to for their impeccable balance of these sciences. Since my acceptance and graduation from this

institution, I have witnessed this program continue to grow and support a vibrantly passionate student body.

Attending the University of Cincinnati was, undoubtedly, the right decision for me. I couldn't be more proud of my education and to have graduated from the region I call home. As my younger brother approaches his final years of high school and begins considering his higher education dreams, I hold so much excitement for him. But a great portion of that excitement is in the form of anxiety. Anxiety that the future of his education, and those that I have mentored at UC, could be tainted by SB1. A bill that makes local students apprehensive to attend their in-state universities and find support in their local communities.

I have built resilient relationships, like those of native Ohio flora and fauna, by choosing to stay in Cincinnati by attending UC. I have connected with incredible faculty mentors and lifelong friends through this university. I have been granted invaluable environmental career experiences through this university. All of which would never have happened if I hadn't sought out my environmental education at the University of Cincinnati. I am so excited to watch UC freshmen begin to find a similar community and experience through the university's Environmental Science program. To watch them gain the skills, connections, confidence, and independence to consider themselves scientists, just like I did. I can confidently say that the passing of this academic censorship bill will encourage such a vibrant student body to seek their aspirations outside of Cincinnati and Ohio. Education should serve all students and degrees, rather than put the well-rounded integrity of some degrees at risk.

Senate Bill 1 will alarm students, their families, and raise questions about the value of their higher education. The language is deceitful and endorses diversity while removing the opportunity to seek it. I hope you will understand how concerning this bill is to the bright future of passionate students and the ability to find acceptance at higher education institutions in Ohio. I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

Thank you for considering my testimony.