

Opponent Testimony for SB 1

Senate Higher Education Committee

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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Members, Ingram and Koehler, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony. My name is Dr. Katherine Ranum, she /her.

I am a visiting assistant professor of history at Xavier University in Cincinnati where I have taught for two and a half years. I am a graduate of two great Ohio institutions of higher education (Mount Vernon Nazarene University and the University of Cincinnati) and had the privilege of earning credits at three more (The Ohio State University, Columbus State University, and Hebrew Union College). I am also a lay pastor at University Christian Church. As you can see, I have spent and still do spend much of my life working with college students. In the course of my education, I have attended both liberal and conservative schools, secular and religious ones, multi-million dollar institutions, and ones so small if one person coughs everyone gets a cold

I strongly oppose SB 1 on constitutional, moral, and practical grounds. SB 1 proposes to protect diversity of opinion while threatening every other manner of human diversity in the university setting. It advertises itself as the defender of intellectual freedom while threatening faculty for introducing “controversial topics.” This not only runs counter to logic it runs counter to our Founding and the legacy of American institutions of higher learning. There is a reason students come from around the world, including from autocratic regimes, to attend American universities: it is our national habit of challenging the status quo. This process can be adversarial and, indeed, uncomfortable, but it produces some of the greatest research and scholars in the world. It has also produced the longest running democracy still extant, the United States.

In my years as a student, I thankfully experienced few instances where I was genuinely worried about expressing my true opinion. On the other hand, many times I felt uncomfortable as a classmate or professor challenged my assumptions through a lecture, reading assignment, or discussion. Sometimes these challenges immediately changed my mind. Other times, these troubling ideas worked on me over decades. In other cases, I rejected the ideas as unethical, illogical, or running counter to established facts. Never, however, have I ever wished no one had pushed me.

Through decades of counseling patients, Dr. M. Scott Peck, the great 20th century psychiatrist, came to define evil as the inappropriate avoidance of pain. This bill asks students to inappropriately avoid pain while threatening educators with retaliation if they challenge the politics of the moment. Political regimes, I will remind the committee, change. Similarly, Eugene Peterson, the theologian and translator of *The Message* Bible, defined a mature Christian as someone who is nearly impossible to offend. Protecting students from “controversial topics” through SB 1 will make them vulnerable to poor reasoning and insulate them against the necessary work of maturing into stable citizens. They will be

stunted emotionally and intellectually and therefore vulnerable to the seduction of Strong Men. No matter who you are, history is an unsettling topic. If you are always comfortable studying it, you aren't studying history.

Admittedly, at a private university like Xavier, I would be insulated from many of the immediate impacts of SB 1. It is even possible that we would benefit from an influx of students fleeing the policing of ideas at state schools. However, those students would almost certainly only be the ones who could afford private tuition, leaving lower-income students to navigate an increasingly hostile learning environment. Furthermore, what is bad for one part of the educational system is bad for the whole.

To close, I am asking the committee to reject SB 1 and any bill that would make educational institutions subject to the political whims of those in power. If Ohio chooses to police her scholars in such a way, future citizens will judge us and find us lacking. And I, for one, will agree with them.

Thank you for your time and for your service on behalf of Ohioans.