

Testimony of Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor, J.D., Ph.D.

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

My name is Elizabeth Smith-Pryor, and I am an associate professor of History at Kent State University, where I have taught American, African American, and American Women's History for twenty-three years. I do not represent Kent State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

First, as a long-time faculty member of Kent State's faculty union, I completely oppose the bill's provision that maintains that faculty unions cannot bargain over workload, retrenchment, evaluations, and tenure. Removing the ability to bargain over these issues essentially turns Ohio's public university faculty into at-will employees without any real job protections. This is union-busting.

Second, this bill will expose Ohio's faculty to unsubstantiated complaints about restricting "intellectual diversity" in the classroom. Faculty will spend hours responding to unsubstantiated and evidence-free complaints instead of spending those same hours preparing classes, grading assignments, and mentoring students. The quality of education will suffer in Ohio's public universities if the classroom is turned into an antagonistic environment instead of a place of engaged learning.

Similarly, I am also extremely concerned by the bill's requirements that relate to course syllabi especially the demand syllabi be made accessible online to the public. I have seen no explanation behind the requirement for doing so and fail to see any connection with the claim of promoting open intellectual inquiry. Instead, I am worried that the public posting of syllabi will lead to online harassment of instructors. I am surprised the state legislature would expose hardworking teachers to the possibility of receiving threatening and harassing emails.

I am especially concerned since the subjects I teach, including African American History and Women's History, are likely to be targeted by outside extremists. For more than the past two decades, I have been deeply committed to providing the highest quality education in all my undergraduate and graduate courses. The topics I teach are critically important to understanding our nation's past. We do ourselves and our posterity a disservice by making these subjects more difficult to teach accurately. Unfortunately, if SB 1 passes, and given the historical topics I teach, if I find myself subject to online harassment and trolling, I will have to reconsider whether I can afford to teach and live in a hostile environment like Ohio.

Finally, I am also concerned by the efforts to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at state universities. Let's be clear about what this is really about—this is a call to segregate Ohio's public universities, a call to deny underrepresented students and others equal

opportunities by returning to a time when racial discrimination was either state-supported or customary.

Respectfully, I ask that you reject this bill, which will, in addition to the issues I have raised here, only lead to real, irreversible damage to Ohio's higher education with a long-term impact on the state's ability to economically compete with states that don't undermine the integrity of valuable public goods like public colleges and universities.