

February 2, 2025

Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for reading my testimony today. My name is Britta Bielak, and as a Professor at one of Ohio's public universities, I am one of Ohio's citizens whose livelihood would be most significantly and immediately impacted by the passage of SB1. My testimony is written as a citizen and not as a representative of my employer. I urge you to deeply listen to the testimony of educators and, most importantly, of students as you consider both the immediate and long-term impact this bill's passage would have on fellow families and citizens of Ohio who are currently serving our state or furthering their education in order to one day be of service.

Who on this committee can provide Ohioans with the data you have collected through your engagements with a large and varied cross section of students, faculty, and administrators at all of Ohio's higher education institutions which validate the extensive need for control and reform proposed in this bill? If this data does not exist, as I expect it does not, I would like to strongly encourage the suspension of a vote on SB1 until this necessary, collaborative engagement has taken place as an in-depth, unbiased research study including both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and civil community dialogue. What an approach like this could offer is a pathway to effective and sustainable inclusion that does not rely on suppressing and controlling Ohio's existing public servants, your fellow citizens, in order to increase representation of others. If this legislation were sincerely constructed with the goal of improving higher education in Ohio for all citizens and for generations to come, this community-engagement would have already been completed, this bill would have bi-partisan sponsorship and it would have been fundamentally revised since its first incarnation.

It seems that at the heart of this bill is a desire for more equitable representation of a range of public policy ideology in Ohio's higher education system, as defined in the bill as "intellectual diversity: multiple divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues." Multiplicity and variety are key to growth and innovation as it relates the acquisition of knowledge, and the development of research, community and policy. However, there are two critical and concerning aspects to this framing of "intellectual diversity" that imply its subversive interests. First, 'perspective,' or the multiplicity of "opinion" as later discussed in the legislation's commitment statement, could be founded in misinformation, truth-omissions, or conspiracy theory, just as easily as based in science or by facts. The presentation of ideas, opinions, or perspectives based on falsity or misrepresentations of the truth is not scholarly or ethical and most certainly should not be presumed to be included under the umbrella of "intellectual diversity." Secondly, rather than adding this newly defined type of diversity, to the "multiple, divergent and varied" life experiences, abilities, identities, religions, and beliefs that already represent Ohio and American citizens alike, this bill is written to suppress, diminish, and remove other types of diversity already present in institutional employees and students and to mandate an outsized role of promoting "intellectual diversity." One way it does this is through the construction of a "controversial belief or policy," as defined in Sec 3345.0217, which designates a curated selection of such issues to be 'the subject of political controversy' when most of them are simply aspects of culture or position on an international planet that, like any policy or idea, will elicit "multiple, divergent, and varied" perspectives. Many cultural issues have become politicized and a tool for increasing division and allegiance. These ideas and issues are not rooted in politics, and therefore are not political in nature, but

our government has become a primary avenue to support, protect, or suppress these issues, making them inseparable from politics. Making this particular selection of issues and tagging them as 'controversial' is biased, antithetical to promoting real "intellectual diversity" and creates conditions for the very "indoctrination" prohibited in Sec 3345.0217. Actions like requiring a civics course written by government appointees, instead of professors, most certainly would NOT present "multiple, divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues," and could also create a scenario for the very "indoctrination" prohibited in Sec 3345.0217.

Instead of directly addressing this desire for inclusion through a transparent and equitable process, the framework set out in SB1 is structured to suppress and control existing employees through increased state-run interventions, oversight and required adherence to certain beliefs even in exchange for funding and compliance. This will create a system of alarming and sweeping disempowerment of all faculty – regardless of ideology – through extensive removal of our collective bargaining rights. Other actions - like reducing the importance of research and peer-review by devaluing the tenure process, making faculty targets of harassment and surveillance through required public display of our schedules, contact information, and syllabi, and making punishable the efforts to create safe, vulnerable spaces for learning that are based in foundational human experiences of kindness, empathy, and inclusion – demonstrate a dis-investment in not only our educators and education system but in our youth and their potential. This reduction of human-centered policies increases fear, reduces safety, and de-values the role our institutions play in populating our state and country with doctors, lawyers, nurses, architects, designers, educators, scientists, and many other professionals who keep us healthy, housed, safe, educated, and who do so with kindness, respect, and empathy. As an educator in a professional program, I witness first-hand the eagerness that our students have to receive an education and begin work in our region involving the life, health, and safety of Ohioans. Maintaining a diverse and robust education system in our state is one of the best ways to ensure our youth continue to learn the complexities of the systems which construct our planet and our cultures and allows them to understand the real-world social, health, and environmental impacts of their work, and to do so with empathy, kindness and respect for a diverse set of clients and contexts.

Empathy. Kindness. Respect. These personal and cultural traits do not seem to be present in this legislation or the impacts this legislation will have on your fellow citizens, intentionally so or otherwise. This legislation will not improve the education of our youth, the workplace of our educators, the quality of university education and groundbreaking research and service to our community. This bill, however, is clearly written to suppress diversity in an attempt to lift a singular voice into the landscape. This is not an equitable, rational, or democratic approach to the inclusion desired and will reduce diversity and success of research, students, and faculty. The repercussions of passing SB1 will have lasting negative effects on the quality of public higher education in Ohio. It is imperative that we do not let political agendas interfere with the fundamental principles of education that we hold so dearly.

As representatives of the people of Ohio, I implore you to vote against this bill. Consider how sitting down together and discussing concerns and needs of both educators and legislators *together* could lead to truly collaborative and inclusive outcomes that benefit Ohioans and the future of our state. Thank you for your continued attention to this critical matter and the opportunity to testify in opposition of SB1.

Sincerely, Britta Bielak