

Higher Education Committee Chair Roegner, Ranking member Ingram and the honorable members of the committee.

My name is Randy Cunningham, a resident of Cleveland, Ohio and I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 1. Senate Bill 1 on Higher Education in Ohio has to be looked at two different ways. The first way is to look at the actual text of the legislation. There is another way to look at it, and that is to ask why it is being proposed, and what the context of the legislation is. In short, how it fits into what is going on the society, and what its impact is likely to be.

The context of this legislation are recent events in American academia that have raised the ire of those who have power in our society. The most recent example were the college protests over American foreign policy concerning the Israel, Palestine, and the war in the Gaza strip. It is basic for American foreign policy that Israel is exempt from criticism. When such criticism happens all the powers of our society mobilize to suppress the criticism. Any time dissent has been heard on college campuses from Vietnam to George Floyd, to Gaza, legislative bodies go hysterical and adopt an attitude of “kill it before it multiplies.” That is the backdrop for this legislation.

The text of the legislation would make you think it was written by the ACLU. It shouts from the roof tops about how its authors love freedom of speech, intellectual diversity, and debate between contending bodies of thought. But I think the authors are protesting too much. When I was working, I always told my clients, who were predominantly poor and often homeless, that whenever someone in power tells you not to worry, you better worry. The very fact that the authors feel this need to say that no one should worry about this legislation’s impact on freedom of academic speech, should cause students and staff and academics to worry. Whatever the true intent of the authors, it says that the State of Ohio will be watching you, and that very fact, is intimidating.

A foot note to this concern is the mandating that all students take a course in American civics so they may learn the truth about the American economy (capitalism) and American politics

and government. This begs the question, whose truth, about America. I think we know what the line is going to be so let's call it for what it will be. Indoctrination. Plain and simple and probably from a very conservative viewpoint.

Now for the real meat of this bill, and that is the issue of DEI. DEI is controversial in this society for many different reasons, but one thing is very clear. The push to get rid of DEI is a push to undo the progress that our society has made to recognizing that the history of America, is not a history of straight, white men. It is an American history, and if you are not willing to address the history of all Americans, you are not telling the truth. You are promoting a lie. Once again, the authors of this legislation rush to defend themselves, by condemning segregation and discrimination against those who have until recently been left out of America's story. But no matter how much they wash and scrub, the fact is that this legislation is a step back into the past. It is targeting the progress we have made over the past 50 years in building a more tolerant, enlightened, and democratic society.

For all these reasons, I urge you to vote against this bill.

Thank you.

Randy Cunningham