

Testimony of Phoebe Gaffney
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina D. Roegner, Chair
February 9, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of myself as a private citizen. My name is Phoebe Gaffney and I am a 21 year old University of Cincinnati Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies student with a certificate in LGBTQ+ Studies. I am here today to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB-1).

When making my final decision to go to the University of Cincinnati (UC) in 2021, one of the most important deciding factors to me as a queer woman was the inclusiveness and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. Coming from a small town in Michigan, I had little to no access to community based on sexuality so I often felt like an outsider. While having the opportunity to stay in state for a lower price, UC became a no-brainer due to the substantiality of their LGBTQ+ and Women's centers and programs. If this bill were to have passed back then, I would not have chosen to go to college in the state of Ohio as those DEI departments would be prohibited.

After deciding on UC, I came to Cincinnati knowing absolutely nobody and feeling like a fish out of water. One of the first events as a freshman that made me feel like I belonged was the "Big Queer Welcome," put on by the LGBTQ+ Center. At that event, LGBTQ+ alumni, students, and faculty of all ages came to interact with incoming students like me to show that they had a community that supported them. The idea that SB-1 could ruin the opportunity for many other incoming LGBTQ+ students to gain the support that many of them have never had before would be a great loss.

Another great loss to UC and the greater state of Ohio would be the termination of my Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies degree. Due to my degree mainly discussing multiple perspectives on issues like electoral politics, foreign policy, immigration policy, marriage, and abortion, SB-1 would essentially terminate the ability to teach it. This is because SB-1 would prohibit institutions like UC from endorsing or opposing those issues as they would be identified under the bill as controversial beliefs and policies. The idea that four years of my tuition, hard work, and dedication would be seen by the state of Ohio as a waste of time and money is incredibly disheartening, and would force me and other students in my major to transfer elsewhere out of state. By transferring out of state, UC would lose out on many students' tuition which would in turn negatively affect Ohio's economy as a whole.

If my degree is gone, that would also affect the professors that have given their time and dedication to enlightening other students and I on those subjects. This is because teaching about those controversial beliefs would at best make them victims of retrenchment and post-tenure review and at worst cause them to be fired from the university altogether. By losing such a significant percentage of top tier professor jobs at UC which is the largest employer of the Cincinnati area, that would be economically and politically devastating for the state of Ohio.

How can senators whose campaigns are dependent on creating good jobs for Ohio be voted for in re-election if they passed a bill that would directly dismantle them?

In conclusion, the passing of SB-1 would detrimentally affect the students, professors, senators, and the greater economy of Ohio. What student or professor would want to attend a university in Ohio knowing that they would not be supported? Ohio citizens deserve to have the same access to community and resources that I have had. For these reasons, I hope you consider my testimony and vote NO on SB-1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Phoebe Gaffney