

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
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Faith Gingrich-Goetz, J.D.
Private Citizen

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

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony today. My name is Faith Gingrich-Goetz, and I am a lifelong Ohio resident and a current staff member and educator at the University of Cincinnati. Though my professional experience has given me firsthand insight into how this bill would harm Ohio's higher education institutions, its students, and its workforce, I write this testimony as a private citizen - drawing on my personal experiences growing up in Ohio and my personal experiences within Ohio higher education institutions. The views I express here today are my own as an individual and do not reflect the views of the University of Cincinnati.

I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 1, *Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act*, and the extensive changes that it would make to practices and policies at Ohio higher education institutions. While at first glance SB1 seems to be promoting intellectual diversity and freedom of thought, once you begin to even crack beneath the surface, the long-term negative impacts of SB1 become all too clear. At its core, SB1 is an attack on many of the fundamental principles of higher education: academic freedom, critical thinking, and open discourse. It places unnecessary restrictions on faculty, administrators, staff, and students, limiting their ability to engage with diverse perspectives, share factual information, and cultivate an environment that fosters learning and intellectual growth. Thus, while the bill claims to promote intellectual diversity, it does the opposite - stifling dialogue and discouraging rigorous academic inquiry.

One of the most troubling aspects of SB1 is the definition of "controversial belief or policy." By categorizing topics such as climate policy, electoral politics, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, and abortion as inherently controversial, the bill undermines the very essence of education: the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Universities do not indoctrinate students; they teach them how to think critically, assess evidence, and engage in thoughtful discourse. SB1's attempt to constrain faculty from teaching on certain issues deemed as "controversial" is a direct attack on intellectual freedom and an insult to both educators and students.

Even more alarming is the complete prohibition of any diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives without actually defining what DEI encompasses. This lack of definition will have a chilling effect on vital student services, faculty training, and community engagement. Universities will likely overcorrect out of fear of noncompliance, resulting in the elimination of essential resources that support marginalized students, including students with disabilities, first-generation college students, veterans, and LGBTQ+ students. If the bill's intent is truly to create an inclusive learning environment, banning all diversity, equity, and inclusion programs outright contradicts that goal.

SB1's provisions on faculty hiring and tenure review further undermine academic freedom and fair labor practices. The ban on diversity statements and the prohibition of certain collective bargaining subjects set Ohio back in terms of fair employment policies. These measures will discourage talented faculty and staff from coming to or staying in Ohio, weakening our institutions' ability to compete nationally. The bill's attack on tenure, faculty evaluations, and workload policies erodes job security and disincentivizes research and innovation, which are critical to the advancement of higher education.

By creating a hostile academic environment, SB1 will drive students, faculty, staff, and researchers out of Ohio. Marginalized students, who already face systemic barriers in higher education, will seek institutions in states that prioritize inclusivity, academic freedom, and intellectual diversity. If we want Ohio's higher education institutions to be competitive, if we want Ohio's workforce to be competitive in a global economy, we must invest in policies that attract and retain talent, not push them away with restrictive legislation.

The current language of SB1 is not about promoting intellectual diversity or strengthening education - it is about controlling and censoring the learning environment. It threatens free speech, academic freedom, and fair labor practices, all while failing to provide clear definitions and guidelines that would ensure fairness and transparency. If passed, this bill will irreparably harm Ohio's reputation as a place for robust intellectual engagement and higher education. I urge you to vote NO on SB1 and instead support policies that empower Ohio's students, faculty, staff, and higher education institutions to thrive.

Thank you,
Faith Gingrich-Goetz