

Testimony of Faith Sturm-Poth

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee

Senator Kristina D. Roegner, Chair

February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Higher Education Committee.

My name is Faith Sturm-Poth. I am a graduate of Akron Public Schools with plans to go to college. I am writing as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I can't help but look at this from the perspective of an older sister, as that is a title I will always have and will always come first. My younger sibling may go to college someday. It is imperative to me that the college is a safe environment for them. As much as I may want to, I can't look out for them forever and be a fly on the wall, following wherever they go. Women's centers and queer spaces are absolutely essential in ensuring a safe environment for students, especially in times such as these when women and LGBTQ+ people face their rights being stripped from them. Finding people like you, having that support to turn to can be crucial. Your college years are pivotal years of change and growth; the first time for many that they're living on their own. It can be something of a 180. A lot of people thrive in college, but many will suffer in those beginning years. I don't want that to be my sibling, but I know I can't do much to change that if it were to happen. We're five years apart and I will be somewhere else, moving through my own life. These centers that offer support, I cannot stress enough, are crucial to me for their safety as an outlet and so many others as well. Centers that this bill would remove.

Furthermore, being able to speak about so-called "controversial" issues in classrooms is important in general. I agree that a classroom environment without biases would be a wonderful thing, but everyone has inherent biases, and when it gets to the point that we're prohibiting genuine and accurate discussions in class, it's more detrimental. These issues that the bill seeks to ban are facts of life and won't go away if we're not allowed to talk about them. Being able to talk about such issues openly creates a safe space to learn, to explore new ideas, and to have your voice be heard. These are all things I desire for my sibling and all other young people, including those my age and older. Everyone who wants to go to college deserves a safe and open learning environment, one which this bill would take away.

In conclusion, Senators, I ask you to take into consideration what this bill is worth to you. For me, it is not worth compromising the safety of POC, women, queer, and trans youth. Because that is what will happen if this bill comes to pass, and I will not hesitate to go out-of-state for college in order to not only be safe, but get the complete learning experience. I urge you to listen to us and vote NO on Senate Bill 1.