

Testimony of Susan E. Cole, Ph.D.  
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair  
February 11, 2025

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

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill 1. My name is Susan Cole, and I am a professor of Molecular Genetics at The Ohio State University. Today I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. However, my testimony is informed by over 20 years of service as a faculty member at OSU and, more recently as the Chair of the Department of Molecular Genetics. I appreciate this opportunity to speak in opposition to the proposed legislation. Despite the title of the bill, enacting this legislation will not “advance” higher education in Ohio but will instead contribute to its downfall: undermining Ohio’s efforts to attract and retain a talented workforce; wasting state money; degrading free expression; and inhibiting the preparation and retention of workers in the state of Ohio.

As written, Senate Bill 1 covers an overwhelming terrain, addressing issues as varied as the right to strike, tenure protections, “bias” in the classroom, mandatory DEI trainings, partnerships with Chinese institutions, and mandatory coursework/reading in American government and history, among others. There is not time or space to address all of my concerns regarding this bill, though in today’s testimony, I have no doubt you will hear from opponents in all of these areas. Today I will focus on the most salient concerns for me.

First, I would address the bill’s concerns surrounding intellectual diversity and controversial beliefs. Many of the proposals in SB1 are grounded in the mistaken belief that discussions in university classrooms are designed to indoctrinate students into a specific viewpoint regarding so-called controversial beliefs. My experience in my own classroom (where I actively discuss the intersections of genetics and social policy), and in observing the classrooms of my peers, shows that faculty at Ohio universities are already deeply engaged in supporting students in thoughtful discussions around topics where reasonable people may disagree. We already actively expose our students to diverse viewpoints, as required by our commitment to education and by existing legislation including, but not limited to, Senate Bill 135 of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The passage of Senate Bill 1 will not in fact promote broader discussions that engage diverse viewpoints surrounding these topics. It will instead have a chilling effect, ensuring that these topics will not be discussed at all, and providing a legislative barrier to OSU’s commitment to “Education for Citizenship.”

Second, I want to remind everyone what is really covered under the umbrella of “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.” Contrary to what many groups have suggested in public, Diversity Equity and Inclusion considerations are not about indoctrination of any kind. They broadly consider how to increase the expression of diverse viewpoints and beliefs within the context of higher education to strengthen the input from those who are not routinely included in the public

discourse. This includes actively supporting the success of students from rural areas and from reduced economic backgrounds – this is critical for many districts in Ohio, and how can we expect to expose our students to the concerns of these groups if they are not supported in taking a place at the table?

I would also highlight that passage of this legislation will have a chilling effect on the recruitment and retention of the very workers who support the state of Ohio economy. Every day I hear from colleagues and from students who plan to move out of Ohio, motivated in part by the concerns that the state legislature actively opposes the work that they do and the people that they are. I have personally spoken with students, staff, and faculty candidates who have declined to apply for education and employment opportunities in Ohio or have actively sought to move to other states out of fear of the consequences of legislation like Senate Bill 1. At the most fundamental level, passage of this bill will undermine the state education system and the state economy, with consequences that will reach decades into the future.

Finally, I would remind you that Senate Bill 1 is at its core an unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible piece of legislation. Many of its mandates are presently in place. Students in Ohio and across the country are already required to complete coursework in U.S. History and Government, and this requirement is further supported by existing general education requirements at OSU, along with the recent creation of the Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society. Similarly, all universities in Ohio already collect and make available course syllabi, regularly review faculty (even post-tenure), and offer students the opportunity evaluate instruction in every course they take. This means that many of the requirements of Senate Bill 1 will actually increase the cost of a college education for our students. Requiring the reorganization and administration of these requirements is a clear example of unnecessary government overreach and fiscal irresponsibility that threatens the fiscal stability of our higher education system and our state.

I urge the members of this Committee to stand up for intellectual diversity and support the economic underpinning of the state of Ohio through their rejection of Senate Bill 1.