

Matthew C. Connolly, PhD
10 February 2025

Subject: Testimony in Strong Opposition to Senate Bill 1

Dear Committee,

As a professor at a community college, I am profoundly disturbed by Senate Bill 1. I am writing you today to voice the reasons for my strong opposition in hopes you will consider opposing the bill yourself on behalf of students and faculty members across the state of Ohio.

What makes the SB1 sinister is the abundance of specious claims designed to tout the bill as a guarantor of diversity of thought. The bill is self-contradictory, as it purports to safeguard the very principles—free speech and intellectual diversity—that it will instead devastate by creating a monoculture based on fear, conformity and assent. How can a bill embrace intellectual diversity by mandating what can and cannot be taught in the classroom? How can a bill support open dialogue by endorsing an atmosphere that punishes any whiff of opposition to the values it wants to impose throughout higher ed? Common sense says it can't.

Resistance to governmental overreach is a tried and true Republican concern, and yet this bill is government overreach in every aspect. Its writers and most of its supporters are non-experts who are seizing on inflated culture war issues without listening to expert educators who have spent their lives in the profession. Senator Cirino highlights his three years of experience learning about higher education issues in Ohio. I have twelve years of experience teaching in Ohio myself, and my colleagues have this and much more.

While controlling the content we teach, the bill also aims to silence faculty voices by attacking our collective bargaining rights. The bill is coming for our livelihoods, dismissing our expertise, and making assumptions about who we are and what we value. This bill underestimates how much educators care about students from all walks of life, with varying life experiences, multiple political viewpoints, and diverse backgrounds. As a writing instructor, I teach students to tell their stories, to gauge multiple viewpoints, and to act on their convictions. This bill suffocates the beauty that comes from the productive collision of viewpoints, substituting its own viewpoint for everyone else's.

I know that if you assess responses to this bill, you will find that the experience of those who oppose its policies far outweighs those who support its overreach. It is clear to me that this bill's supporters are mostly outsiders with limited firsthand experience of the classroom environment. Had they spent real time in the classroom, they would bear witness to the embrace of free thinking and diversity that already makes college a worthwhile endeavor for developing adults, and they might just breathe the clean air this bill aims to pollute.

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