

Testimony of Nicholas Seay  
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair  
February 10, 2025

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

My name is Nicholas Seay, and I am a student in the Department of History at the Ohio State University, where I have studied for the past six years as a doctoral student. I do not represent the Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. Like Ohio Senate Bill 83 which came before, Senate Bill 1 is an obvious bad faith attempt by lawmakers in Ohio to undermine the integrity of education in Ohio's public universities.

One of the main claims of the drafters of the bill is that public universities in Ohio currently suffer from a lack of intellectual diversity. In my experience, first as a student at the University of Cincinnati (2010-2014) and now as a doctoral student at the Ohio State University (2019-present), this is not an issue. In my coursework a history student at both institutions, professors and instructors have always emphasized the necessity to grapple and engage with a diverse range of political, social, and religious points of views. Another section of the proposed bill directly contradicts the stated goal of promoting intellectual diversity, by attempting to restrict discussion on so called "controversial beliefs or policies." This section of the bill requires institutions to affirm and declare that faculty and staff will allow students to reach their own conclusions and not "indoctrinate." The purpose of this section of the bill is to stifle discussion, prevent individuals from voicing their opinions with argument-based logic, and promoting health debate and intellectual diversity.

Rather than promote intellectual diversity the purpose of the bill is to intimidate and cause fear among faculty and staff so that they avoid topics that are essential to developing critical thinking, especially in the history classroom. It's true that studying truths about the past can be uncomfortable. Exploring the past often means confronting the difficult realization that the world has been shaped by conflicts over wealth that have been mediated by divisions among human societies along class and racial lines. This is a fact of history; it is not a theory or ideology. Ignoring or downplaying this truth is harmful because it makes it impossible to create the space for coming to terms with the past, improving ourselves, and creating space for healing. One can determine therefore that SB 1, which pretends to be a response to public concerns about history education, is something else entirely. Most Ohioans and most Americans support the work of historians and advocate for embracing truth over lies. This is not a partisan issue. As the American Historical Association's recent study pointed out, three quarters of both Republicans and Democrats supported teaching history about "harm that some groups did to others," even if it causes students some discomfort.

(<https://www.historians.org/history-culture-survey>)

Rather than support the work of higher education, SB1 appears to be an attempt to disrupt the work of higher education by saddling already-overworked faculty and staff with new requirements, such as publishing course syllabi online on public websites. This only adds a

new layer of work for adjunct instructors and professors who have more important things to do, including working with their students and contributing to the research agendas of Ohio's public universities. I wonder to myself, why do Ohio's lawmakers seek to chip away at the success of universities like the Ohio State University, which ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation among research universities? I can only assume that the motivation behind such demands is to create a public form of policing of the work of faculty and instructors. Perhaps the lawmakers seek to encourage public harassment of instructors by creating an easy and universal way for anyone with internet access to seek out and harass faculty or instructors who dare to mention topic, concepts, people, or sources with which they disagree. Why would lawmakers who claim to support students and instructors in higher education seek to encourage such a threat to the public university classroom?

If the bill passes, what will the bothersome censors from the state be looking for? Maybe they will be surprised to find out that courses in US history talk about racism, white supremacy, nativism, exploitation, gender discrimination, class conflict, and other concepts that will make readers uncomfortable? Maybe their purpose is to instead water down the teaching of history to the point where it is no longer a serious field of study, but instead a fairytale version of history. Believing such a mythological version of history is immature and only does a disservice to the public, who nonetheless must grapple with the legacy of the past. Would it not be better if they were able to do so with an understanding of the history which they, by virtue of their existence, have inherited?

I have had the great opportunity to graduate from Bowsher High School in Toledo, Ohio, where I first fell in love with the study of history. I was then motivated to continue my studies in history at the University of Cincinnati (B.A., 2014). After developing linguistic expertise in three languages and earning an MA outside of the state, I returned to Ohio State to complete my PhD in history (expected this year, 2025). I can tell you that the wonderful training by excellent historians at these institutions has been a life-changing experience and has allowed me to develop an incredibly nuanced understanding of the past. Passing SB 1 will deprive many students like me of the same opportunity and would therefore be a huge disgrace to the state and its institutions. For these reasons I strongly oppose the passage of this bill. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Seay