

Testimony of Katherine Castiello Jones, Ph.D.
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 Katherine Castiello Jones, and I am a professor of Sociology and Game Design at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for ten years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. The signing of this bill into law would not only impact me as an academic, but also impact the education that I provide to my students, and the programs that I am part of at the University of Cincinnati.

In addition to my work in the Sociology department, I am also one of the faculty for the newly created BFA in Games & Animation. As part of the major I teach one of our required courses, Diversity in Gaming. My students deserve to receive training that will make them competitive on the job market in these industries. My own work providing gender equity training to the game development teams at the Warner Bros. Games Division has demonstrated that these skills are desired by prospective employers and will give our students an advantage as they enter the workforce. This training is directly threatened by SB1.

Past scholarship has demonstrated that these types of legislation have a widespread “chilling effect” over the potential topics taught, even if the legislation does not directly prohibit classes that deal with “controversial beliefs.” This wide range of topics directly affects the curriculum I provide my students in both the Games & Animation and Sociology programs. I worry that my sociology students, who find jobs in a wide range of fields from healthcare to service provision to public policy, and who go on to get advanced degrees in the fields of law, medicine, or social science, will be disadvantaged compared to their peers from other institutions due to this “chilling effect.” Right now our undergraduate sociology majors are incredibly successful in finding employment or in pursuing advanced degrees post-graduation, but this could change if SB1 regulates what we are able to teach and places the government in a position to decide what is best for students, rather than the faculty themselves. This in turn has the potential to decrease enrollments across Ohio, as students choose institutions that will better prepare them for advanced degrees or job placements.

My final concern and opposition to SB1 comes from the impact it will have on the ability to attract and retain high quality researchers and faculty to Ohio institutions of higher education. SB1 includes measures that basically abolish the tenure process, allow for retrenchment, and overall make faculty positions in Ohio much more precarious. These policies, coupled with prohibitions on collective bargaining around these issues, make faculty positions at public institutions in Ohio much less attractive. Higher education relies on faculty. Faculty who have

job security are able to more fully focus on the core aspects of their jobs, research and teaching students, without having to worry that their position is constantly in jeopardy.

This also means that Ohio will be less able to attract engaged, ambitious, and high quality candidates to faculty positions in their public colleges and universities. I am currently on a job search committee where we have a wide range of exciting candidates that we are reviewing. Yet, I worry that if SB1 were to pass many of these candidates would be unwilling to accept a position in Ohio. Top candidates, with strong research and teaching profiles, will have many other options open to them, meaning that Ohio will once again be disadvantaged compared to other states in their ability to recruit and retain faculty who excel in their fields.

SB1 is a bad idea for multiple reasons. This legislation could cause real damage to our institutions of higher education. In the long run it could make Ohio less competitive economically as it will make it more difficult to attract students and faculty to Ohio institutions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Katherine Castiello Jones