

Testimony of Pierluigi Bonello, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
Feb. 6, 2025

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

My name is Pierluigi “Enrico” Bonello, and I am a professor of Plant Pathology at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for over 25 years and do research on issues related to forest health, particularly under the effects of climate change, which is an eminently non-controversial topic (and not a “belief” or “policy,” as defined in the bill) among specialists like me, i.e. people who know what they talk about. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1.

The bill as written is a set of solutions in search of non-existing problems. None of the “issues” the bill purports to correct actually exist in real life. Due to time constraints, I cannot address all of them. So I will confine myself to aspects of the bill that “Require institutions to affirm and declare that they will seek out invited speakers who have diverse ideological or political views” and that “Require institutions to affirm and declare that faculty and staff will allow students to reach their own conclusions about such topics and will not attempt to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious view,” and that “Prohibit institutions from endorsing or opposing any controversial belief or policy with the exception of matters impacting the institution’s funding or mission,” where “controversial belief or policy” means “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion.”

I have been at different premiere institutions in the US for over 30 years, and no institution I have been a part of has ever “forbidden,” by *fiat*, any point of view or any speaker from speaking on campus. Therefore, in the absence of irrefutable evidence, I submit to you that this is a malicious lie meant to foment division where no division exists.

I suspect that what the original sponsor, Sen. Cirino, has in mind is that so-called conservative voices are sometimes not welcome by university “communities.” This, of course, is different from being “prevented” to talk by the institution itself, which, as I said, does not occur. Instead, Mr. Cirino seeks to FORCE certain viewpoints even when they are not welcome. So a better question may be: Why are certain viewpoints not welcome, for example when such viewpoints claim that climate change is simply a hoax or that global warming is a thing but is not caused by humans and therefore there is no need for any changes in policy?

Let me try to answer that question. Universities are by design a place for free inquiry using sophisticated thinking based on empirical evidence. Whether it is the hard sciences, or the humanities, faculty and students are trained to use the logic of induction and deduction, based on empirical evidence, to come to

their own conclusions. For this reason, the vast majority of faculty and students on campuses across the nation do not welcome certain messages expounded by certain so-called conservatives. Mind you, it's not that the speakers are "prevented" by the institutions themselves to speak on campus. You simply cannot force communities of learners, as you find on university campuses, to accept viewpoints that do not conform with the logic of induction and deduction based on empirical evidence. Many of the so-called conservative viewpoints Sen. Cirino wants to force on campus are simply nonsensical, fact-free "thinking", or beliefs with respect to science or any other field of knowledge, i.e. they do not conform with rigorous inductive and deductive thinking. Of course, one can still express nonsense, as allowed by the first amendment, but that person cannot expect to be paid attention to. Does that mean there is no intellectual diversity on campuses across the Nation? Of course not.

This is just a smidgen of the reasons this bill is so bad for Ohio. It's based on falsity surrounding non-existing problems and is designed to divide. The bill is simply a dog whistle to try and capture votes, not honest discourse.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this extremely harmful and dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.