

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ella Walden. I am a senior biology student at Kent State University. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Before I state why I oppose, I want it to be clear that this is purely my opinion. This is not a reflection of my university or any previous employers. I'm not receiving a grade or extra credit by being here, I am simply passionate about this.

College is meant to be a pursuit of knowledge for specialized career fields. I believe that this bill censors that pursuit which is extremely unfair and unconstitutional. I trust the faculty at universities to make decisions on their education policies. The faculty that works with students every year knows the struggles we face and values our input on our courses. My university has surveyed every semester asking for our critics on the courses we took. Rating the professor by their ability to teach the material, respond respectfully to all students, and their availability to help students learn outside of the classroom. We also are given surveys on safety on campus, what resources on campus we are really impressed by or utilized, or ones that need to be worked on. Lawmakers will damage this natural process of a university improving on itself because they will not be there the way the university faculty are. Their choices on policies will not be nearly as genuine and will most likely delay the university's progress on becoming a better university even with good intentions.

I also believe that colleges should be politically neutral spaces that hold space for all and not just the few. For all means a person's physical characteristics or personal beliefs do not impact on the availability of resources. Inclusivity does not harm the majority; it strengthens the entirety. I benefit from resources and scholarships at my university because I come from a single-parent household, even though I am not a part of a marginalized group like an immigrant or person of color. While I may not experience discrimination, that does not prohibit me or anyone from empathizing with another human being and sharing opportunities together.

I also believe our history, both positive and negative, needs to be told. We are not a perfect nation, and ignoring the parts of history where we were the villains will not make us more heroic, quite the opposite. It is admirable to admit mistakes and correct them and refuse to make those mistakes again. We must learn our history to move forward and improve. Professors shouldn't fear discussing the uphill battle for people of color in our country's history or ignore the struggles in the LGBTQ+ community. I have been a college student for the entire duration of the occupation of Gaza. We have a right to know what is happening and the right to express a formed opinion based on reality and not filtered information.

As a biology student, this bill's restrictions on faculty and their ability to address controversial beliefs is alarming. There is a difference between believing and accepting something. You can believe mullets are ugly or that bacon is the best breakfast meat. But you have to accept that the bank is closed on Sundays, the freezing point of water is 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and the Earth is round. You cannot believe hard enough to change these truths. Science is always about a healthy

desire to question the world around you, but there are real people who unhealthily question everything, it's called paranoia. At Kent State I have walked past individuals trying to convince students that the Earth is flat. They have a right to free speech and a right to visit the public university, but deeply paranoid people should not hold back the learning of any student body.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this eroding bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.