

Testimony of Brenna Miller

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 Brenna Miller, and I am a PhD student of Musicology at The Ohio State University. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1. I encourage you to emphatically vote “No” on Senate Bill 1.

As a scholar of Holocaust and Genocide studies within music, a particular quote came to mind upon learning about SB1. After World War II, the German pastor Martin Niemöller spoke out about his complicity in the Holocaust and he penned the famous words:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.¹*

Niemöller’s statement is an ever-relevant warning against complacency in the face of rising authoritarianism. In this context, Ohio SB1 (2025), which seeks to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, eliminate faculty labor rights, and redefine educational priorities in the name of ideological conformity, echoes dangerous historical precedents. This legislation represents a poor-faith attempt to control intellectual freedom in higher education, paralleling the cultural and academic purges of Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich.

One of the earliest tactics of the Nazi regime was to suffocate intellectual independence. Germany did not enact the Holocaust in one day. The 1933 Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service expelled Jewish, socialist, and politically inconvenient professors, gutting Germany’s universities of dissenting voices.² SB1 follows this same blueprint, targeting faculty who promote intellectual diversity and stripping them of their right to collectively bargain. This is not mere policy—it is a calculated assault on the principles of free thought, designed to turn Ohio’s universities into centers where only state-approved ideology is tolerated

¹ “Martin Niemöller: ‘First They Came For...’,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*,
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists>

² “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*,
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline-event/holocaust/1933-1938/law-for-the-restoration-of-the-professional-civil-service>

and that state-approved ideology is not determined by members who have political motivations to silence any and all “undesirable” perspectives and methods of critical thought.

Musicology offers a case study in the devastating consequences of ideological censorship. Hitler’s regime condemned “degenerate music” (Entartete Musik), erasing jazz, Jewish composers, and avant-garde movements from public life. This wasn’t just about taste—it was about silencing entire cultures and histories.³ Ohio SB1, with its crusade against DEI, is the same blunt-force instrument of repression. Just as the Nazis purged culture to control thought, SB1 seeks to gut education to control the future.

Niemöller’s warning is not and should not be considered only a reflection of the past—it is a call to action. SB1 is not just a bureaucratic change; it is an all-out war on academic freedom. First, they come for DEI programs, then for faculty unions, and soon, they will come for entire disciplines: history, philosophy, literature. Will musicology and the arts survive when the only acceptable scholarship is the one that bows to political orthodoxy? This bill is a death knell for free thought in Ohio, a descent into authoritarianism that history has shown never ends well.

Let’s not mince words: Ohio SB1 (2025) is an embarrassment to democracy, a cowardly attempt to turn higher education into a tool of political suppression. It does not promote fairness or intellectual growth—it promotes obedience. We must call it what it is: a disgusting overreach that threatens the core values of education and sets a dangerous precedent to tighten the noose around the people and institutions the state of Ohio is proud to be home to. Niemöller’s words remind us that waiting to speak out is a dangerous game—and by the time you are the target, it is already too late.

³ “Art and Music Under the Third Reich: Entartete Kunst and Entartete Musik Exhibitions,” *Music and the Holocaust*, <https://holocaustmusic.org/politics-and-propaganda/third-reich/entartete-musik/>