

Testimony of Sarah Hayford, PhD

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee

Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair

February 11, 2025

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

My name is Sarah Hayford, and I am a professor of sociology at Ohio State University, where I have taught for 10 years. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Senate Bill 1 is unnecessary. University policies around free speech and academic freedom already ensure that faculty can teach, and students can learn, a wide range of approaches and perspectives. SB 1 would add burdensome requirements and extensive red tape. Similarly, requirements for faculty evaluations outlined in SB 1 duplicate policies already in place at Ohio universities.

Senate Bill 1 is harmful. The bill contains broad language regulating teaching around “controversial beliefs,” which are defined as “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.” This definition is not based on any academic content or university-related issues, but rather on decisions made by politicians. Because the definition is so broad, it will have a chilling effect on teaching and learning. This bill, if passed, will lead talented students and faculty to avoid Ohio universities.

In fact, potential faculty are already declining to apply for positions in Ohio. I am serving on a search committee to hire a senior faculty member, and applicants with records of excellence in research, teaching, and mentoring students, as well as substantial portfolios of external funding, have declined offers to interview based on concerns about future limits to academic freedom if SB 1 is passed.

I urge you to vote against Senate Bill 1.