

Senate Bill 1 Testimony Alexis Wade

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1

Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education

February 10th, 2025

Alexis Wade, Co-Chief of Staff of the Undergraduate Student Government

The Ohio State University

We, the undersigned student leaders representing The Ohio State University, Bowling Green State University, John Carroll University, Kent State University, University of Dayton, University of Akron, Denison University, and Case Western Reserve University together representing more than 125,462 college students across the State of Ohio, write today in firm and absolute opposition to Ohio Senate Bill One and any related legislation that seeks to impose undue restrictions on the academic freedom, diversity, and institutional independence of our state's higher education system.

The "Advance Ohio Higher Education Act" is a direct assault on the very foundations of our universities. If passed, this bill would strip institutions of the ability to govern themselves, limit the free exchange of ideas, silence conversations on critical social and historical issues, and impose top-down ideological control over faculty, staff, and students. This bill fundamentally undermines the mission of higher education: to create an environment in which students can engage in free thought, challenge perspectives, and grow into informed, engaged citizens. By restricting the teaching of multiple perspectives, SB1 directly undermines the purpose of higher education: to equip students with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate complex, real-world issues. Universities exist to foster intellectual diversity, not to impose a singular, state-controlled narrative. This legislation, rather than strengthening Ohio's universities, would suffocate them, forcing compliance with rigid, state-imposed guidelines that contradict the principles of academic inquiry and intellectual diversity that our institutions are meant to uphold.

At the core of this bill lies the complete erasure of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. DEI programs exist not to limit discourse, but to expand it. They ensure that

students from all backgrounds, particularly those who have historically been marginalized, have the opportunity to thrive on their campuses. This bill's prohibition of DEI offices, trainings, and scholarships is an outright attack on students of color, LGBTQ+ students, women, students with disabilities, first-generation college students, and other historically excluded groups. It signals to these students that their perspectives, their needs, and their presence are unwelcome. At a time when hate crimes, discrimination, and mental health struggles are rising on college campuses nationwide, eliminating DEI efforts does not promote an open marketplace of ideas—it endangers students and faculty alike.

Furthermore, this legislation threatens the very autonomy of higher education institutions by mandating a government-imposed curriculum. The state should not have the power to dictate what is taught in college classrooms, nor should politicians decide which perspectives are “acceptable” in academic discourse. By requiring universities to offer a state-mandated civics curriculum while simultaneously restricting faculty and administrators from engaging in so-called “controversial” topics, this bill is an explicit attempt to push a specific ideological agenda under the guise of neutrality. The study of history, governance, and society should be informed by rigorous scholarship and critical inquiry, not by legislative decree.

Equally alarming is the bill's sweeping changes to faculty tenure and governance. Tenure exists to protect academic freedom, ensuring that faculty members can teach and conduct research without fear of political retaliation. This bill effectively nullifies that protection, subjecting faculty to excessive and politically motivated oversight that will force many of Ohio's best educators to seek employment elsewhere. Additionally, the proposal to cut academic programs that produce fewer than five graduates per year threatens to dismantle entire disciplines, disproportionately affecting fields in the humanities and social sciences, further eroding the depth and breadth of Ohio's academic offerings. Rather than allowing universities to govern themselves, SB1 imposes excessive political control over curriculum, faculty, and student discourse—undermining the independent thought and debate that higher education is meant to uphold.

The implications of this legislation stretch far beyond our campuses. The elimination of DEI programs and faculty protections will make Ohio's universities less competitive, driving students and faculty to institutions in other states that continue to value academic freedom and inclusivity. Employers, who increasingly seek graduates with the ability to navigate diverse workplaces and engage in meaningful, informed discourse, will find Ohio's institutions failing to prepare students for the realities of the workforce. If Ohio aims to be a leader in higher education, economic growth, and innovation, it must foster institutions that attract and retain top talent—not legislate them out of existence.

Perhaps most egregiously, this bill was drafted without meaningful input from the very people it will affect the most: the students, faculty, and university leaders of Ohio. As elected representatives of our student bodies, we were not consulted on the sweeping changes this bill seeks to impose, nor were the faculty members who dedicate their lives to the education and success of students across this state. This legislation is not about improving higher education—it is about controlling it. If lawmakers truly care about the future of Ohio’s colleges and universities, they must listen to those of us who live, learn, and work on these campuses every day.

We, the undersigned, urge the members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee to stop this bill in committee and prevent it from moving forward. Should it proceed, we call upon the Ohio Senate and House of Representatives to reject this dangerous and harmful piece of legislation. If lawmakers wish to enact meaningful higher education reform, they must do so by engaging with students, faculty, and administrators—not by silencing them. We will not stand idly by as this bill threatens the future of Ohio’s higher education system, and we will continue to fight for the academic integrity, inclusivity, and independence of our universities.

Bobby McAlpine

The Ohio State University Student Body President

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Justin Robinson

The Ohio State University Student Body Vice President

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Elyse Adrian

Bowling Green State University Student Body President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elyse Adrian".

Madison Jefferies

Bowling Green State University Student Body Vice President

Madison Jefferies

Ryan Moore

John Carroll University Student Body President

Ryan Moore

Mike Noonan

John Carroll University Student Body Vice President

Mike Noonan

Jessie Starkey

Kent State University Student Body President

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Aila Carr-Chellman

University of Dayton Student Body President

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Stuart Schramm

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Grace Dewitt

University of Akron Student Body President

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Elena Kozma

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Noah Chartier

Denison University Student Body President

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Case Western Reserve University Student Body President

Amman Spencer

Addendum:

The following institutions actively participated in the drafting process of this testimony and are currently undergoing internal review for final approval of their endorsement:

University of Miami (*16,478 Students*)