

Testimony of Joseph Cummins, MA, LPCC-S, LICDC-CS
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 7, 2025

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

My name is Joseph Cummins, and I am a professor of Human Services at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for 11 years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

My concern is that SB 1, as written, will do more to quench the free expression of ideas than to promote this cherished value we hold as citizens of the United States and Ohio.

SB1 purports to promote and 'ensure the fullest degree of intellectual diversity' in all aspects of higher education, from hiring practices to course design. SB 1 affirms the importance of 'allowing students to reach their own conclusions about controversial beliefs, and to not seek to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious point of view.' I have no argument with these goals. In my view, places of learning have long valued and served as centers for the free discussion and forming of ideas. I cherish the free expression of ideas in my own classroom.

There seems to be some concern about the issue of indoctrination. I am sure this occurs in some places. However, my experience is that this is the exception, not the rule. If there is a need to establish safeguards in this regard, then let's discuss. But I find that SB 1 is an overreach. Many of the provisions, as currently iterated in SB 1, will do more to quench the free expression of ideas. As I read SB 1, I am forced to at least acknowledge and wonder about my own vulnerability for expressing my ideas or promoting the expression of ideas that are deemed 'controversial.' My read of SB 1 is that it is unnecessarily restrictive, (even punitive) regarding the expression of ideas that might be deemed 'controversial' depending on the ideology of the ruling body at any given time. Am I to withhold my own ideas, or the introduction of differing ideas for the sake of considering multiple points of view? This potential 'quenching' of free expression, it seems to me, will have the opposite effect of what SB 1 is trying to achieve.

A second concern I have regarding SB 1 is the attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion. I love the diversity, the pluralism that is apparent in our society. It is part of what makes America so wonderful. I full heartedly believe all should have equal access to all the opportunities our great country provides. But we cannot ignore, that the playing field, so to speak, is not equitable. I do not view such a stand to be an indictment on our society, but rather a recognition. I fully understand that many in our society question the effectiveness of many of the DEI programs/approaches that have been established with the goal of ensuring access to our society's benefits. I understand that not all DEI approaches are effective. But the open attack that is displayed in SB 1 is, in my view, unwarranted. Years of progress in this effort will be lost, if SB 1 passes and is enforced as written.

Our society is not perfect. I am okay with that. There is work to be done. The approach promoted by SB 1 will not solve our difficulties. It seems to me, a more thoughtful, critical approach is what is demanded. An approach that grapples with the issues, allows for free expressions of many ideas, from many points of view and ideology.

For this reason, I oppose SB 1.

Thank you for your consideration.