

Testimony of Gina M. Hounam, PhD
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 9, 2025

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

My name is Gina Hounam, and I am an alumni of both The Ohio State University where I received my undergraduate degree and the University of Cincinnati where I received my Master's and PhD degrees. I do not represent these universities, but I do train and hire students from these and other Ohio universities. For this testimony, I am submitting as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am writing to object to SB1 that quickly moving through the Ohio Senate. This bill does nothing to improve the state of higher education in the great state of Ohio, but rather weakens our ability to educate the next generation of leaders, scholars, researchers, and professionals.

SB 1 stands in opposition to academic freedom AND teaching and supporting the growth of undergraduate and graduate students. If we want Ohio to continue to be a state that educates leaders of tomorrow, we must not place politically motivated restrictions on public higher education. Universities add significantly to the growth of Ohio and are a strong example of learning and achievement. Contrary to the discussions of those pushing this harmful bill, SB 1 RESTRICTS free speech and academic freedom. It minimizes critical thinking and will do nothing to enhance our future economy of thinkers and doers in Ohio. To be clear, I teach in a "non-political" field -- but I recognize the harm this over-reaching bill will have on the climate of higher education. I urge Ohio legislatures to stand against this unpopular bill. Ohioans are not interested in this biased and politically motivated plan.

My memories of both Ohio universities I attended are filled with opportunities to encounter thoughts and teachings different than my own. My growth into a strong Ohio leader in my field is based on the autonomy I was given as an individual to seek my own facts and truths to what I wanted to believe. Being provided a limited version of what government oversight views as appropriate will in time limit the thinkers and scholars of tomorrow and we will not be better for it.

I urge legislators of Ohio to think broadly on what injustice they are wishing to remedy with this bill and make appropriate amendments to focus there, versus broad strokes of ambiguity allowing power over anything that touches on or adjacent to diversity. I urge legislators to stop broadly cancelling "DEI" initiatives in the hopes that our world will be a more just space for our future. Limiting the freedom to teach our brightest students who attend these world

class universities is simply unjust. This is not where growth and excellence begin, it is where these things end.

Let us actually strengthen the great institutions of higher learning we have in the State of Ohio. Faculty are here to support learning and growth of the next generation of learners. Demonizing the work they do is not only unhelpful – it is harmful – and goes against the tenets of higher education in general.

I submit this testimony in opposition to this harmful bill. I urge moderate and thoughtful action to move Ohio forward – not backward.

Respectfully submitted,

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