

For HB 151:

Testimony of Darice Polo, Associate Professor at Kent State University
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair

May 15, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Higher Education Committee:

My name is Darice Polo, and I am an Associate Professor of Studio Art at Kent State University, where I have taught for 20 years. I do not represent Kent State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to House Bill 151.

I'm appalled by your attack on my freedoms as a citizen and professor living and working in the State of Ohio. You are essentially robbing me of my ability to exercise my freedoms as a citizen and more importantly as an employee of Kent State University, where I have successfully and tirelessly worked at educating hundreds of students. I followed all the guidelines setup by the University to achieve tenure so that I could move forward with my research in a Research One institution without being threatened with retaliation or dismissal. By enacting House Bill 151 you are effectively violating the contract I have with the University for your own political gain. You are attempting to prevent me from actively going on strike against the types of bills and policies you want to put into place. This is a direct attack against my freedom of speech. In addition, you are clearly attempting to break up the teachers union and working to destroy our ability to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the University.

You are also endangering our student body by prohibiting opposition to systemic racism, sexism and discrimination. In addition, by prohibiting us from making known our stance against racism, sexism and discrimination, you are effectively creating an atmosphere of mistrust between the student body and the University. You are also ignoring the caliber of scientists working in our institutions of higher learning in the State of Ohio and denouncing their contributions by prohibiting climate change policies or the idea of a sustainable future. Moreover, you are endangering the citizens of Ohio with this climate policy.

By enacting this bill, you are lowering academic standards and jeopardizing the State of Ohio's ability to attract the best teachers and students in the country and the World. If this goes through, you will see an exodus of exceptional talent and minds leaving Ohio for other states who respect academic freedom. Shame on you for bringing your politics into our institutions of higher learning.

If you pass this bill, I will work with my fellow citizens and professors to sue the State of Ohio for violating my freedoms as a citizen, for violating my tenure contract with the University, and for creating an unsafe environment for me and my students.

This bill is a step backward and clearly shows that the State of Ohio does not support innovative teaching and learning and lacks the leadership to position the State of Ohio to be a trailblazer in any type of industry.

I stand with the ACLU of Ohio in opposition to this legislation and urge Ohio lawmakers to cease consideration of House Bill 151.

Darice Polo