

Testimony on House Bill 49

Ohio Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee
Senator Randy Gardner, Chair

Erin Susick
Assistant Professor of Mathematics
President, Belmont College Faculty Association

Chairman Gardner and Vice Chair Williams and members of the committee, I am Erin Susick, an Assistant Professor of Mathematics. This is the first time I have come to testify before the Legislature but I felt compelled to share my views about some of the new language that the House of Representatives added to the budget.

Sick Leave Allowances

A significant decrease in allowable sick time would be a hardship for faculty and staff at Belmont College. Almost all types of leave an employee can take comes from our accrued sick time. Maternity leave, in particular, is taken from sick days. A decrease in hours will make it much harder for new parents to accumulate enough hours to take the necessary time off to care for the needs of both the mother and their new baby. This is also true for any employee that has taken time off for a serious illness for themselves or a family member - sick leave allows for employees who are ill to seek proper medical care and focus on recovery. Employees on a 12-month contract will be particularly impacted by this change.

Colleges and universities should be able to individually determine an appropriate amount of sick time that is cost effective for the institution and fair to the employees. The faculty at Belmont College voted last summer to join the Ohio Federation of Teachers with an overwhelming majority of more than 90 percent. The provision in the budget that would prevent a collective bargaining agreement from allowing a greater amount of sick time would take away our hard fought right to negotiate our working conditions. The language to restrict collective bargaining in this bill is similar to that of SB 5, which was overwhelmingly defeated by voters in Ohio.

Post Tenure Review

Belmont College does not currently have a tenure policy and all faculty members are on a one-year contract only. As a result, the faculty members do not know from year to year whether or not they will be returning to the college. This is something we will address in our collective bargaining agreement and was one of the determining factors for unionization. A lack of job security makes the academic climate at the school unstable. Each institution should be able to determine their own tenure policy, which would include a termination policy and a review process.

A stable tenure policy enables faculty to do their jobs effectively. They have the ability to teach their subject matter without fear of censure and try new, innovative pedagogical methods. Requiring a review process as stated in the bill would be a step backward.

Financial Disclosure - Textbooks

Considering that the state of Ohio is moving toward more affordable/free textbooks, the financial disclosure is unnecessary. Belmont College has already predominantly switched to open source and/or e-textbooks. In seven years of teaching at the school, I have never received anything from a textbook publisher/author except a sample text or a math-related magnet. This measure would increase administrative work at the institution while not providing any useful data.

This concludes my testimony, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.