

Testimony on Substitute House Bill 49
Ohio Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee
Senator Randy Gardner, Chair
Senator Sandra Williams, Vice Chair

Submitted by: Lisa Voigt (Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, The Ohio State University)

Chair Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and Senators Bacon, Dolan, Kunze, Thomas and Wilson, my name is Lisa Voigt and I am an Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at The Ohio State University. Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony on aspects of Substitute House Bill 49 that pertain to higher education faculty and staff. Let me begin by saying that as a faculty member I am familiar with the climate of budget anxiety and austerity that has been pervasive at universities since even before the financial crisis of 2008, and that I am sure you are facing now as you develop the state's next two-year budget. Despite these fiscal challenges, I hope you will reconsider the flat funding of the State Share of Instruction (SSI) that, in combination with a mandated tuition freeze, makes it extremely difficult for universities to meet our shared goal of ensuring the highly educated, globally aware citizenry and workforce that we all know is necessary for our state to thrive. It was discouraging to learn, from prior testimony presented before this committee, that higher education makes up only 4% of Ohio's total expenditures—one-third of the national average—and that Ohio also falls well behind the national average in the amount of state support for higher education in other respects as well.¹ I have also learned that the program most targeted to address college affordability for underprivileged and first-generation students, the Ohio College Opportunity Grant program (OCOG), is radically underfunded (by \$150 million), currently receiving less than half of what it did in 2008-2009. These budgetary decisions paint a discouraging picture of the state's priorities in relation to the preparation of its workforce and citizens.

I'd like to focus on three specific sections of Substitute House Bill 49 that directly bear on university employees. **Section 102.023** requires a financial disclosure statement from "every faculty member of a state institution of higher education that assigns a textbook for a course in which the faculty member teaches." Since "textbook" is defined as "any required instructional tools... used specifically for curricular content instruction in a

¹ Among the unfortunate statistics to be found on the "Ohio budget support for public higher education report card" for 2016, issued by the Young Invincibles Student Impact Project (<http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/YI-State-Report-Cards-2016.pdf>), are: Ohio is among the states with the highest "family share," with 63% of total college costs paid by students and their families through tuition (12% larger than the national average); Ohio spends 23% less per student than before the 2008 recession and almost \$2000 less than the national average (\$4314 per full-time student); Ohio allocates only \$244 in grants per student each year, well under half of the national average; there are significant attainment gaps between black and white Ohioans and between Latino and white Ohioans (18 and 25 points, respectively).

course,” the requirement would presumably apply to all faculty members for every course they teach, since it would be hard to imagine a course taught without instructional tools. This new disclosure requirement is irrelevant, unjustified, and wasteful of time and resources. While some of the language replicates parts of other sections in HB 49, part (2) refers to gifts received from “any person that represents or has an interest in supplying or making available textbooks for purchase.” Frankly, I have never heard of any gifts offered by textbook suppliers. The only thing I’ve ever received, or heard of anyone receiving, from a publisher is a sample or examination copy, so that we can see a textbook in advance and decide if it is the best choice for a given course. However, I hardly think a sample textbook qualifies as a “gift,” since its only benefit to faculty is that it allows us to make a more informed choice for our classes and students.

The references to textbooks in this section lead me to believe that the new disclosure requirement is meant in some way to address the high cost of textbooks. Let me assure you that faculty members share that concern; we know that students will not buy textbooks if they are too expensive, and will look instead for shortcuts or will not do the reading at all. Fortunately, there is now a wide availability of editions for purchase and rental via online bookstores like Amazon. Because most of my classes are about the period between 1492 and 1800, many of the books I teach are in the public domain and are available in online archives such as googlebooks; I usually weigh this option with the utility of textbooks whose introductions, glosses, and footnotes can better facilitate student understanding, particularly in lower-level courses. Among the textbooks I most frequently use, one (*Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*) is available to rent on Amazon Prime for \$10.42 or to purchase (used) for \$4.02; another (*Aproximaciones al estudio de la literatura hispánica*) costs \$17.29 to rent or \$13.85 to purchase (used). I believe that faculty would welcome the opportunity to participate in discussions regarding ways to increase the affordability of classroom materials, as we are the ones who face these choices most directly. There are many ways to make textbooks more affordable, but this cumbersome and ineffective mandate will not contribute to that result.


Let me address two more sections of Substitute HB 49 more briefly. **Sec. 3345.451** requires the board of trustees of each public university to adopt a one-size-fits-all procedure for post-tenure review. The creation of such a procedure is superfluous, for a comprehensive review of faculty members’ teaching, research, and service activities already takes place annually (rather than every five years as suggested in this section), both leading up to and after tenure. In my department and many at OSU that I know of, faculty members submit a report and supplementary materials documenting their activities in each of these three areas over the preceding year, which are reviewed by the department’s executive committee as well as the chair. In addition to student and peer evaluations of instruction, these reports are the basis of our annual performance and salary review. These annual reviews already serve to “facilitate continued faculty development” and to “ensure accountability through the comprehensive evaluation of every tenured faculty member's performance,” as sought by this regulation. Indeed, in

terms of the rigor, transparency, and accountability of the review process, my experience at OSU compares favorably to my prior institution, the University of Chicago, where I taught for eight years and was awarded tenure, through a no more demanding process than the one I experienced at OSU. This mandate, like the financial disclosure one, is unnecessary and potentially counterproductive if it leads to a weakening or displacement of review procedures that are already in place.

Finally, I am concerned about the reduction in sick leave for university employees as mandated in **Sec. 124.38**, to 2/3rds that of other public employees. I am not sure what justifies this seemingly punitive discrepancy. I have been fortunate not to need to use sick leave myself, but I am concerned with how this policy would impact new parents seeking to use sick leave as part of their parental leave, and the non-academic staff employees who are frequently underpaid and overworked, since many of the budget cuts we have experienced in recent years have been absorbed through a reduction or consolidation in staff positions.

I urge you to remove the aforementioned mandates from HB 49, as well as to consider increases in the State Share of Instruction and the Ohio College Opportunity Grant program, in order to demonstrate Ohio's commitment to high quality education at its public universities and to help meet the state's degree attainment goals.² Thank for the opportunity to provide this testimony; I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,



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² An increase may not be as difficult as it seems. According to Policy Matters Ohio, "Closing the 'passthrough' tax break on business income would make \$580 million available to support essentials like need-based aid, easily enough to fill the \$150 million OCOG gap. A \$1 million investment in OCOG helped more than 3,000 students skill up at our two-year schools. Increasing this investment ten-fold to \$10 million could help thousands of students and adult learners at a cost that less than 2 percent of the passthrough tax break." See more at: <https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/quality-ohio/revenue-budget/budget-bite-affordable-college#sthash.ge08ftv9.dpuf>