

Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 15, 2023

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

My name is Valerie Miller PhD, MS OTR/L and I am a professor of Occupational Therapy at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for five years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

I believe that House Bill 151 poses a huge threat to post-secondary education. One of the ways that universities continue to innovate and provide high quality education is by allowing academic freedom. House Bill 151 poses a huge threat to the academic freedom that professors have had for centuries. The oversight by political officials instead of educational professionals that House Bill 151 is proposing is completely inappropriate and insulting to hear that politicians believe that they know how to do our job better.

There are many provisions in House Bill 151 that are concerning to me as an educator that works in this state. I believe that some of the provisions, such as providing the curriculum for certain history courses and requiring faculty to submit all syllabi for review is a huge slippery slope towards a totalitarian government. Additionally blocking DEI efforts which have paved the way to make a more supportive environment for marginalized people is a huge setback. I work in Occupational Therapy and we are constantly looking for ways to bolster diversity within our profession. We rely heavily on the support of our DEI resources within our college and department for guidance to support inclusivity. To abolish or limit the ability of those resources to support us would be a detriment to our diversity recruitment processes.

Lastly, prohibiting the ability for faculty members to strike against an institution that may choose to implement unfair practices is removing the fundamental right of us as employees. If House Bill 151 passes, I will likely start looking for employment opportunities outside of the state of Ohio for other states that have much friendlier laws for post-secondary educators. While I've only been a professor for 5 years, I have had consistently high annual reviews and high evaluations from students. I say this to point out that the state of Ohio will likely have a crisis of losing quality post-secondary educators if House Bill 151 goes into effect as I believe I am not the only one that will question the decision to remain at an Ohio University.

My biggest question is why? Why is this legislation being proposed, and why now? This seems like a political stunt to further the agenda of one political party. I believe this legislation is going to have far reaching negative effects beyond what I can even comprehend at this time. Please reconsider why you're looking to pass this bill and what this will truly mean for Universities, professors, and most importantly, students. I think the fact that this legislation has even been proposed is embarrassing and a shame for Ohio. I am not against all of the proposal but I really think heavy modifications need to be made for this to not have such far-reaching negative implications. Please reconsider this and please make sure you're looking out for your students above everything else.