

Testimony of Dominic Wells, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and 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 Dominic Wells and I am an assistant professor of political science at Bowling Green State University. I am also the director of the Fire Administration program. I do not represent Bowling Green State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

First, I will address the labor activity changes in this bill. This bill prohibits the right to strike for campus workers. Many of our public universities are unionized. I personally am an assistant professor at one of those unionized universities. Our process of collective bargaining is effective. We have a good working relationship with administration and collective bargaining helps us solve problems together. Eliminating the right to strike and limiting the scope of bargaining would greatly shift the balance of power and make this strong working relationship less effective. Further this is a solution for a problem that does not exist. Strikes are very rare in the university system.

Second, I will address the changes made regarding post-tenure review. There is a misconception in the public that professors are not evaluated enough, especially after they earn tenure. The public does not fully understand, and I suspect neither do many in the legislature, how much professors are evaluated. As an assistant professor on the tenure track, I am evaluated by the students, my colleagues, the chair of the department, a college-level committee, and the Dean of the college annually. Students submit evaluations of all of my classes and these evaluations are included in my annual evaluations and merit evaluations. Each year I go through Annual Performance Review, where a committee of my colleagues in the department, the chair, a college-level committee, and the Dean of the college all evaluate my work. In the third year of an appointment, we have Enhanced Performance Review. This review goes through the same process as Annual Performance Review, but looks at my accomplishments in my first three years. Each year there is also a merit review process where a committee and the chair evaluate my work to determine if I've earned a merit-based raise. Of course there is then the tenure and promotion review at the end of the 6-year probationary period. If I have met or exceeded expectations in that review of my work, then I earn tenure and am promoted to associate professor. If I do not earn that promotion and tenure, my appointment at the university is terminated.

Following tenure, there continue to be evaluations. Students continue to evaluate professors and those evaluations are included as part of merit evaluations. Tenured faculty go through merit evaluations every year to determine if they earn the merit raise. If faculty do not meet expectations in teaching, research, and service, there is an extraordinary review process where several levels of the university evaluate the work of the faculty member. It is a myth that tenured professors have jobs for life. Tenured professors can lose their jobs for poor performance or in situations of financial exigency. The post-tenure review process in HB 151 is an unnecessary requirement.

Third, I'd like to briefly address some other changes in this bill. There are many problems with HB 151 and they cannot all be addressed in a single letter. Some of the changes in the bill stem from the misperception that universities are turning out students with "worthless degrees." Most of our students are in fields like biology, business, or education. We have programs like the one I direct that help first responders further their education, earn promotions and earn raises. Still, we believe in a well-rounded liberal arts education where students learn things outside of their majors. There is also no need to dictate what should be taught in an American government or history class. When I teach American government, I use a widely accepted textbook that covers many of the things in HB 151 without forcing an ideology on students. Accusations of bias are rare in our department and those complaints are often unsubstantiated. The curriculum requirements in HB 151 are unnecessary.

These are only some of the parts of HB 151 that I strongly oppose. I ask that you help maintain our strong state university system by rejecting HB 151.