

Testimony of Dominic D. Wells
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
November 27, 2023

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

My name is Dominic Wells, and I am a professor of political science at Bowling Green State University, where I have taught since August of 2020. I do not represent BGSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83. This bill makes many changes in higher education that are unnecessary and will increase the amount of bureaucracy in the university system.

There are many provisions in SB 83 that I oppose, but I am going to focus my short written testimony on just a couple provisions. First, the provision removing retrenchment and tenure from subjects allowed to be collectively bargained is an unnecessary change that offers a solution to a problem that does not exist. Many universities in Ohio collectively bargain things like retrenchment, creating clear guidelines for the unfortunate process of cutting programs and retrenching faculty. Administration and faculty alike realize that there are times when tough decisions need to be made. Negotiating the process for retrenchment allows the university to make smart changes according to an efficient process. It is a myth that tenure gives faculty a "job for life." Negotiating tenure and retrenchment processes provides reasonable guidelines for administration and faculty.

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 SB 83 is an unnecessary requirement.

As I previously stated, there are a lot of provisions in SB 83 that I oppose. The post-tenure review and collective bargaining related provisions are the ones I have chosen to focus on for this testimony. The changes in this bill are unnecessary and will make the university system less efficient. Please reject SB 83.