

Testimony of Alex Povitsky, Ph.D., full tenured professor, Associate Fellow of AIAA-the largest society of aerospace professionals

Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April the 19th , 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Alex Povitsky, and I am a professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Akron, where I have taught for 20 years. I do not represent the University of Akron, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I disagree with the bill for the following reasons:

1. By the bill draft “Each state institution of higher education shall conduct an annual evaluation for each faculty member who it directly compensates. Evaluations shall be conducted by the department. The evaluation is by chairperson or equivalent administrator, reviewed and approved or disapproved by the dean, and submitted to the provost for review. A state institution of higher education shall conduct a post-tenure review if a tenured faculty member receives a "does not meet performance expectations" evaluation within the same evaluative category for a minimum of two of the past three consecutive years.”

The above procedure will destroy the established tenured system that allows professors act as independent co-managers of universities. This bill will open doors for retaliation, prevent freedom of speech of professors and abandon the concept of shared governance of universities by professors and university administration.

2. By the bill draft “Student evaluations conducted under the bill account for at least 50% of the teaching area component of the evaluation”.

The evaluations of professors by the students were originally introduced by students’ organizations and were aimed at receiving feedback from students by professors, however, the professors are fully aware about limitations of students’ opinions. In no way these evaluations were introduced as a tool for administrative decisions. The students’ evaluations tend to praise the professors who go light on students in terms of the tests and assignments. Professors, who demand professional knowledge and ability to solve open-ended problems, are typically severely underscored in these evaluations.

3. Regarding “prohibitions on faculty unions striking during contract negotiations”.

Presently the unions are the only bodies that demand salary increase and improvement of working conditions of faculty members. The administration of university tends to increase their own salaries and increase their ranks by creating more and more non-teaching well-paid administrative positions. Also, the universities' administration creates semi-professional and expensive sports' teams using university's budget. In the current spiral of inflation, the salaries of faculty members effectively become smaller. The strike is a tool that allows faculty members to get a decent contract; otherwise, the administration would not listen to faculty members.