

Testimony of Jeanie Lau  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
May 16, 2023

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

My name is Jeanie Lau, and I am a professor of Physics at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for 6 years. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I am deeply troubled by Sec. 3345.451, 3345.452, and 3345.453 (lines 409-520 in the bill as introduced). What introduced here are extremely detrimental to the higher education and student learning in the state of Ohio, for the following reasons:

1. These sections effectively removes tenure in public universities of Ohio. Tenure is the foundation of American higher education system, endowing faculty with the freedom to pursue knowledge, without pressure from political, religious, or commercial interests, or personal likes or dislikes of department chairs and deans. In areas of science, technological, engineering and mathematics (STEM), **tenure also allow faculty to pursue challenging or high risk-high reward endeavors in research, such as those that led to the invention of laser, without worrying about “underperforming” in a number of years.**

2. To answer questions such as “none of the other jobs have job security; why should university professors be different”,

- unlike other jobs, university professors are in the profession of pursuing and creating new knowledge, which is best performed in an environment free from political, religious, commercial or hierarchical interests
- university professors are much underpaid, considering the 10+ years of post-college degree training needed to secure a faculty position, and comparing to their industrial counterparts. For example, I have been a professor for 19 years, and fresh PhD graduates from my group joined Apple or Intel and are earning higher salaries. The fact is that **university faculty is willing to accept the comparatively low salary because of the job security and academic freedom offered by tenure. Thus, to attract same talents without tenure, OH universities will have to offer much higher salaries, or face a brain drain to other states or industry.**

3. **Should the bill pass, fewer and lesser talents will choose Ohio universities, or choose academia at all.** I can offer a personal example — I was recruited by OSU in 2017 as a full professor in University of California, to help OSU to focus on the area of quantum materials. If I had known that this bill would be proposed, I would have never moved.

**4. Using student evaluation as a part of the metrics for teaching performance is problematic and counter-productive.**

- Higher evaluation score does not mean that the students learn more or better. All instructors know that a sure way to secure high evaluation scores is to teach to the test and give out easy homeworks and exams. When your job security is linked to student evaluation, there will be huge incentives to teach to the test and water down the content. This will lead to graduates who are not as well-trained or learnt. In the coming years, the reputation of degrees from Ohio universities will be damaged.

For these reasons, I strongly believe that **the bill will do extensive and irreparable damage to OH higher education, and to the training of a well-educated STEM work force. I urge you to vote “No” on this bill.**