

*Testimony of Josh Birnbaum
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025*

*Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the
Higher Education Committee:*

My name is Josh Birnbaum and I am an associate professor of photojournalism at Ohio University, where I have taught for 13 years. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I am deeply concerned about the damage S.B. 1 will do to the higher education industry in Ohio — creating increased bureaucracy, driving students and faculty away, and reducing enrollments at our institutions, many of which are community drivers of education, job training, and economy.

In particular, I'm concerned about the requirements for annual faculty evaluations because it seems onerously redundant. We already go through an extensive review process every year — we are required to create a 50-page document about the prior year's activities and accomplishments. This document is reviewed and rated by colleagues in our department, and that goes into our record and contributes to tenure, merit, and promotion. More of this would simply be unnecessary and waste resources.

The full-time faculty strike ban seems legally sketchy. All of the faculty I know would never want to strike because we would never want to negatively impact our student's education. But to have that right is important if the academic mission is compromised.

Requiring the public posting of syllabi, an outright DEI ban, restricting speech on controversial topics and generally creating an atmosphere of fear, restriction, and censorship would limit academic freedom and push people out of our great state. Who would want to study here? We should debate these topics. How else will we find the way forward together? Who would want to teach here or work here, if they were constantly in fear of saying the wrong thing? Or if they were afraid of being targeted for teaching a certain subject? I don't see any benefit to the positions in Senate Bill 1. If anything, we need to cut the higher education administration down and focus more on the academic mission.