

Testimony of Sheryl Barringer, PhD
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 Sheryl Barringer, and I am a professor of Food Science and Technology at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for 30 years. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I am writing to express my unequivocal opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 1. I am deeply concerned that this legislation represents an unprecedented level of political interference and micromanagement in Ohio's public colleges and universities, threatening the fundamental rights of workers and the integrity of our higher education system.

Over multiple iterations, including SB 83 and now SB 1, this legislation has presented a series of contradictions regarding freedom of speech. While it purports to promote intellectual diversity, it simultaneously dictates how certain topics may be discussed, creating an environment of censorship rather than open inquiry. Additionally, the bill seeks to ban institutions from requiring training and programs that foster inclusive learning environments, programs that are critical in ensuring students of all backgrounds can succeed.

The mandates proposed in SB 1 would be unworkable, shifting valuable resources—money, time, and attention—away from student learning and toward unnecessary bureaucracy. The consequences would be far-reaching: this bill would make it significantly more difficult to attract both students and faculty to Ohio's institutions, weakening our state's ability to compete nationally and globally. The impact on Ohio's economy would be disastrous, exacerbating the already troubling trend of "brain drain" as talented individuals seek opportunities in states that prioritize higher education rather than undermine it.

This bill does not advance higher education in Ohio. Instead, it is a politically motivated measure rooted in divisive culture-war ideology. In an attempt to score political points, this legislature risks inflicting lasting, perhaps irreversible damage on our universities and colleges. Rather than fostering academic excellence, SB 1 would erode the very foundation of what makes Ohio's institutions of higher learning great.