



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

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**Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Jeff Wensing – Vice President, Ohio Education Association
Senate Bill 1 Opponent Testimony
March 11, 2025**

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Jeff Wensing. I am a high school math teacher from Parma City Schools and currently serve as Vice President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of the approximately 1,200 higher education members from both four- and two- year colleges and universities, and the approximately 120,000 educators that make up the OEA, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to express our unequivocal opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Senate Bill 1 proposes to make extensive changes to practices and policies at Ohio's higher education institutions. The bill proposes to micromanage state institutions of higher education by usurping the authority of boards of trustees and administrators that oversee the daily operations of these institutions by requiring changes to mission statements, faculty workload policies, and syllabi requirements. It also proposes state-mandated performance reviews and evaluation requirements. Additionally, Senate Bill 1 includes a new graduation requirement that college and university students take three credit hours in American Civic Literacy and enumerates a specific list of documents that must be included in instruction, many which are all already covered in Ohio high schools.

These provisions take away institutional flexibility to meet the needs of students enrolled in various education programs in favor of one-size-fits-all state government mandates. OEA believes that these topics are best addressed at the local level with institutions determining systems that work for their students and campuses.

Academic Freedom and Intellectual Diversity

Through adopted local policies, Ohio's public colleges and universities currently have a strong commitment to protecting freedom of speech that creates an academic environment of open discourse and rigorous inquiry. Differing viewpoints are encouraged and not silenced.

In contrast, Senate Bill 1 claims to promote intellectual diversity while dictating the content and way certain topics can and can't be discussed and how faculty should run their classrooms. These restrictions will obstruct academic freedom, critical thinking, and stifle debate. OEA requests that these provisions be removed.



Prohibition on Collective Bargaining Subjects

OEA vehemently opposes the prohibition of evaluations, retrenchment, and tenure as subjects of bargaining. These matters are essential pieces of the terms and conditions of employment that have been successfully negotiated with all involved parties and are a clear erosion of the rights of our educators at Ohio's public universities and colleges.

Institutions of higher education already have faculty evaluation systems in place. These systems allow faculty to have a voice in how they are evaluated because they best understand the complexities of their work which include teaching, research and service. Fair and transparent locally developed evaluation systems, rather than state mandated systems, ensure that faculty are assessed on meaningful criteria rather than arbitrary and biased measures. Locally driven evaluation systems support quality education and long-term institutional success. For these reasons, OEA is opposed to the mandates outlined in the bill regarding state interference in faculty evaluations and request that these provisions be removed from the bill.

Additionally, the bill uses an excessively broad definition of "retrenchment" the process for reduction in force. Retrenchment as defined by Senate Bill 1 is "a process by which a state institution of higher education reduces programs or services, thus resulting in a temporary suspension or permanent separation of one or more institution faculty, to account for a reduction in student population or overall funding...or other fiscal pressures or emergencies facing the institution." This definition will effectively allow academic programs and staff to be terminated for just about any reason, without warning, resulting in instability for students and faculty.

As an alternative, OEA recommends deference to the good faith efforts of each institution's president, board of trustees, and faculty to reach consensus on these matters that best meet the interests of those involved.

Right to Strike

OEA opposes the proposal in Senate Bill 1 to eliminate the right to strike for employees of state institutions of higher education. The right to strike is a final dispute resolution process expressly authorized under Ohio's longstanding public employee collective bargaining law. The purpose of the right to strike is to ensure hard working, dedicated public employees have a meaningful voice in negotiating fair compensation and working conditions that help them provide high-quality services to Ohioans.

Strikes are always a last resort. The actual occurrence of strikes is extremely rare due to the well-balanced bargaining framework and dispute resolution structure in Ohio's collective bargaining law. For example, only one strike has occurred in the last decade at public institutions of higher education with employees represented by the OEA. Further, Ohio law has strict limits on how and when a strike can be authorized. In fact, under Ohio's collective bargaining law, a strike may only occur after a collective bargaining contract has expired, the parties have completed extended periods of negotiation without resolution, formal mediation services have been requested and exhausted, and preliminary notices of a possible strike have been provided, followed by a vote where at least a majority of union members vote

to strike. In addition to protecting the voice of union members, the right to strike also protects the freedom of public employees to use their experience to advocate for the support they need to best serve the public.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Senate Bill 1 proposes numerous changes to DEI efforts including prohibiting mandatory programming or training courses, orientations, offices or departments, or replacing any of the above-mentioned items with something that serves a similar purpose. These prohibitions could negatively impact a student's ability to comply with professional licensure requirements as well as institutions serving veteran's, the disabled, or other programming that fall under their DEI departments. OEA is opposed to these changes and requests more flexibility regarding the prohibitions.

Syllabi

OEA remains concerned about the provision of the bill that requires universities to post individual course syllabi with instructor qualifications and syllabus for each course taught on the institution's website. While this may be well intentioned, OEA believes it is unnecessary and could lead to unintended consequences such as disruptions to classes and could lead to faculty harassment. OEA requests that this provision be eliminated or replaced with language that allows a general syllabus requirement similar to community colleges.

In summary, college students deserve to be respected as adults. They should be offered a wealth of learning opportunities and not be sheltered from challenging or differing ideas. Furthermore, the overreaching mandates contained in Senate Bill 1 could have a chilling effect on attracting students to Ohio. The provisions of the bill will also exacerbate the enrollment decline of diverse and qualified students enrolling in Ohio's teacher preparation programs, further increasing our state's educator staffing shortages.

Those who have dedicated their lives to serving Ohio's higher education students likewise deserve respect, their voices to be heard, and support. Senate Bill 1 would undermine academic freedom, drive wedges of distrust between students and faculty, and impose burdensome government mandates on Ohio's colleges and universities. To grow our economy and keep our system of higher education strong, Ohio must do all it can to attract and retain qualified and committed faculty in all academic disciplines. Senate Bill 1 would instead send an unmistakable message to talented individuals looking to advance their careers in Ohio: go somewhere else.

In closing, OEA opposes Senate Bill 1 as it will cause harm to higher education students, colleges and universities, and Ohio's workforce and economy. This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.