

Testimony of Hongmei Li-Byarlay, Ph.D. F.R.E.S.
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 Hongmei Li-Byarlay, and I am a professor of Entomology and Genomics at Central State University, where I have taught for 7 years. I do not represent Central State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen who is **deeply concerned about the implications of Senate Bill 1.**

As a faculty member in a scientific field, I believe that the pursuit of knowledge in my disciplines—entomology and genomics—requires academic to view the university as a place where young minds should be encouraged to think critically, engage in open discussion, and form their own informed opinions. In my role, I aim to foster curiosity and scientific inquiry, and I worry that this bill would undermine the very essence of that mission. If enacted, Senate Bill 1 could potentially limit my ability to engage students in robust, thoughtful exploration of topics that are central to the study of entomology, including ecological impacts, species diversity, and the intersection of entomology with broader social and environmental issues.

Through my teaching and research, I have consistently emphasized the importance of understanding scientific concepts and their real-world applications—critical thinking is essential in developing solutions to environmental challenges. The discussions in my classrooms go beyond the basic transmission of knowledge; they include thoughtful debates on the ethical and social implications of entomological research. If the scope of academic inquiry is restricted, it would stifle my students' ability to engage fully with the material and to think critically about the issues they will confront in their future careers, particularly as they enter a rapidly changing workforce.

Despite the massive public and bipartisan opposition to SB 1—"The Higher Education Destruction Act"—the Ohio Senate has ignored the will of The People and passed this harmful legislation. Now that it is in the hands of the House of Representatives, I ask that you do not support this bill. At the very least, representatives should be coming together with stakeholders to determine how to mitigate the vast damage this bill will cause in its current form. SB 1 is the epitome of big-government overreach. These bills would impose unprecedented levels of political interference and unnecessary micromanagement on Ohio's colleges and universities. They would severely undermine the integrity of our higher education system. This is why the bill faced strong bipartisan legislative opposition in the last session and failed to advance. This is not a partisan issue.

SB 1 is a series of contradictions that claims to promote "intellectual diversity" while simultaneously attempting to legislate the manner in which certain topics can be addressed

and the way in which professors conduct conversations in the classroom. Such proscriptions would have a chilling effect on academic freedom and would make it more difficult for Ohio's colleges and universities to attract and retain students and faculty. The mere introduction of this legislation has already made it more difficult to conduct successful faculty searches, as people testified to at the marathon SB 1 opponent hearing in the Senate. Ohio cannot afford this kind of brain drain.

SB 1 contains at least 25 different issues areas, which would create an unprecedented number of unworkable mandates, most of which are simply more burdensome versions of what our colleges and universities already do. Giving administrators, faculty, and the chancellor more unfunded busywork takes away from student learning and adds to bureaucratic costs. None of this advances higher education.

The bill also attacks workers' rights by attempting to prohibit fundamental collective bargaining subjects and the right to withhold labor over unfair working conditions. These provisions are a thinly veiled attempt to weaken the voices of faculty, who have every right to advocate for fair working conditions, which are the students' learning conditions. Ohioans have made it clear that we support collective bargaining rights.

Respectfully, I ask that you reject this bill or try to work with interested parties to make important improvements. But as the bill stands now, please LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE and REJECT SB 1!