

Testimony of Dr. Jennifer Clark
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:

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony.

My name is Jennifer Clark. I am a resident of Columbus and a proud member of the Buckeye faculty. I am a Professor of City and Regional Planning in the College of Engineering at The Ohio State University. I specialize in regional economic development policy and planning. My testimony today is not as a representative of The Ohio State University but rather as a private citizen and an internationally known expert on regional economic development, national innovation systems, and economic growth.

I am strongly opposed to SB 1.

I have written several books on the topic of regional economic development and the factors that contribute to, or alternatively undermine, job creation and firm recruitment, retention, and expansion. I can say with complete confidence that this bill will damage the Ohio economy by eviscerating the state's innovation and technology capacity housed in the Ohio university system.

To disrupt an economic ecosystem that is finally working well for Ohio through radical policy changes like those proposed in SB1 would condemn the Ohio economy to the sort of decline not seen since the 1980s (brain drain of young talent, firms leaving the state, etc...). No one wants to go back to the days when Ohio was last on the list of places where young people wanted to live or go to university; last on the list of places that companies wanted to locate; and a national punchline about desperate places of decline and disinvestment.

I urge you to advocate for Ohio's economy and protect our competitive advantage in science, technology, and innovation that took decades to build by choosing sensible, time tested, and mainstream policies to support Ohio's university system now and into the future. Gambling with our state's research and development economic engine is a losing game for all Ohioans.

In the last decade, the Ohio university system, including the world-class medical and scientific research at these institutions, brought the state's private sector economy back from the steady declines of the previous thirty years. This turnaround has been remarkable. People around the world are starting to ask how Ohio managed to turn the page and become a preferred location for technologies of the future: semiconductors, electric vehicles, and medical innovations.

Because of the university system Ohio has a chance to capture the benefits of high-value research and development activity and avoid being condemned to a low-road branch plant economy. But, in order to do this, Ohio must be perceived as a consistent and common-sense policy environment for innovation and investment. No one wants to make long term investments in a state that puts emotions over economy when making policy.

Ohio has come so far in the last decade because of sustained investments in innovation and technology in its universities. The Ohio State University alone has an economic impact of over \$19.5 billion annually on the State plus 116,000 jobs and \$660 billion in tax revenue to state and local governments. This will only grow as the private sector continues to build on the base of research, innovation, and education formed by the university system.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on these unnecessary and economically risky bills. This is a critical moment for the Ohio economy and the choice between continued growth or a return to decline is in your hands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.