

Testimony Opposing Ohio Senate Bill 1

Submitted to the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

Date: March 8, 2025

Dear Members of the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee,

My name is Lucy Farr, and I am a school counselor for Columbus City Schools. I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB 1). As an advocate for the responsible use of taxpayer dollars and a firm believer in the principles of individual freedom, I believe SB 1 represents a step in the wrong direction for Ohio's higher education system. While I understand the desire to address certain concerns, the bill threatens to undermine the very values of academic excellence, fiscal responsibility, and personal liberty that are foundational to the success of Ohio's universities and the long-term prosperity of our state.

Protecting Academic Freedom and Intellectual Diversity

At its core, higher education should encourage the free exchange of ideas, critical thinking, and intellectual diversity. SB 1's provisions could unnecessarily restrict the ability of Ohio's colleges and universities to offer a broad range of courses and perspectives, ultimately narrowing the educational opportunities available to students. A vibrant, high-quality education system relies on the freedom of educators to teach a full spectrum of ideas and to encourage students to think critically about the world around them.

By restricting certain topics or ideas from being discussed in the classroom, SB 1 would limit intellectual diversity and reduce the quality of education that our students receive. This kind of overreach is counterproductive, as it stifles the very innovation and intellectual rigor that attract students to Ohio's institutions. Universities should be places where students are challenged to think independently and be prepared to address the complex challenges of our rapidly changing world.

The Importance of Collective Bargaining and Workers' Rights

Another issue with SB 1 is its approach to limiting the scope of collective bargaining for faculty and staff. Strong, effective collective bargaining agreements are essential to maintaining a fair and competitive workforce in Ohio's public universities. By preventing the inclusion of key issues in these agreements, SB 1 could weaken the ability of universities to attract and retain talented professors and staff.

In addition, restricting the ability of faculty and staff to negotiate effectively for their rights could result in lower morale and reduced productivity, ultimately affecting the quality of education provided to students. Universities should be able to operate with the flexibility to negotiate fair agreements with their employees, ensuring that they have the resources necessary to support their academic mission and maintain high standards of instruction.

Fiscal Responsibility and the Long-Term Impact on Ohio's Universities

As someone who values fiscal responsibility, it's crucial to consider the long-term financial consequences of SB 1. Restricting academic freedom, limiting collective bargaining, and imposing unnecessary regulations could undermine Ohio's universities in ways that ultimately harm

taxpayers and students alike. Universities that are less competitive in attracting students and faculty could see a decline in enrollment and a reduction in state funding.

Additionally, these restrictions could result in higher costs as universities are forced to navigate the complexities of compliance with new regulations or contend with the challenges of faculty unrest. Taxpayer dollars should not be spent on legislation that unnecessarily complicates the operations of Ohio's universities. Instead, we should be working toward policies that ensure these institutions are efficient, effective, and capable of producing graduates who contribute positively to the state's economy.

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) should remain core values in higher education, but it's critical that these efforts are made in a way that aligns with the principles of fairness and academic rigor. SB 1's restrictions may inadvertently limit the ability of universities to foster a campus culture where all students feel respected and supported. By providing students with an education that includes a variety of viewpoints and encourages open dialogue, we are preparing them to succeed in a diverse and competitive workforce.

It's important that diversity initiatives focus on building an inclusive environment without stifling the free exchange of ideas or imposing ideological conformity. Higher education should equip students with the tools to engage in respectful dialogue and understand the full breadth of perspectives on important social and political issues.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 1 represents a misguided attempt to impose overbearing regulations on Ohio's higher education system. While I agree that ensuring responsible governance and fiscal stewardship are crucial, SB 1's restrictions on academic freedom, collective bargaining, and the ability of universities to foster diversity and inclusion could harm the very institutions that are essential to Ohio's success. By stifling intellectual diversity, limiting workers' rights, and potentially harming the long-term financial health of Ohio's universities, SB 1 stands to make Ohio's higher education system less competitive, less effective, and less attractive to students and faculty alike.

I urge you to reconsider this legislation and instead focus on policies that protect the autonomy of our universities, uphold the principles of academic freedom, and ensure that taxpayer funds are used wisely to benefit Ohio's students and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lucy Farr

2599 Riverside Dr. Apt 4C

Columbus, OH 43221

lucylufarr@gmail.com