

Testimony of Rachel M. Stehle, Ph.D.  
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:

Please accept this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1 which was rushed through the Senate to the House, the deceptively named “Advance Ohio Higher Education Act”. My name is Dr. Rachel Stehle and I am a professor of sociology at Cuyahoga Community College. I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen, and not on behalf of my institution.

There are several issues with this bill that will inevitably lead to disastrous consequences for Ohio citizens. First, the attack on diversity, equity and inclusion programs as outlined in this bill is reprehensible. By denying students and employees at higher education institutions the access and opportunity to diverse programming, events, and curriculum, we are severely limiting the growth of our students and our community into a cohesive, unified society. Furthermore, eliminating scholarship and funding opportunities for underserved populations will dramatically impact the enrollment at all of Ohio’s public colleges and institutions. While this bill explicitly names diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, the vague wording that is left up to interpretation implies that this includes ALL populations that benefit from such programming, such as Veterans, non-traditional students, first-generation students, students with accommodations, etc.

This bill also limits Academic Freedom, which is a direct attack on our Constitutional Right to free speech and amounts to censorship. Proponents of this destructive bill falsely accuse professors of “indoctrination” yet provide ZERO evidence this is actually happening. In reality, college classrooms provide a space for open dialogue during which all perspectives are considered and empirical evidence is evaluated to help develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential for citizens to participate in a democratic society. Senate Bill 1 would actually RESTRICT conversations within classrooms on arbitrarily decided “controversial” beliefs. It is commonly understood that learning more about other people and other perspectives reduces conflict and contributes to an individual’s ability to empathize with someone different than themselves. Students have a right to curriculum and programming that includes an exploration of their sociocultural-historical perspective as well as those of others. Students want to learn. They are inquisitive and insightful, and at times, they are more closely connected to the topics I am teaching and have more first-hand knowledge than I do. My students deserve to have their voice heard in my classes without fear of being censored. Academic freedom applies to students as much as it applies to faculty.

Senate Bill 1 also imposes faculty evaluation, retrenchment, tenure, and no-strike policy revisions that are unnecessary and will be burdensome and costly to comply with, especially considering that many Union contracts ALREADY have these provisions explicitly outlined in their collective bargaining agreement made with the college or university administration. This is

purely government overreach!! I invite you to read the contract of the Cuyahoga Community College-American Association of University Professors chapter, which can be found on the public website using this [link](#). The work has already been done to protect the integrity of the academy, the rights of faculty and the institution, and Academic Freedom within the classroom. The implementation of the bill's proposed legislation would be an extreme waste of time and money.

I must conclude this letter of opposition by reminding our elected officials that this bill is a regurgitation of Senate Bill 83, which was unceremoniously rejected at the end of the last legislative session after several revise and resubmits. It failed. Furthermore, let us not forget the overwhelming defeat of Senate Bill 5 in 2011 by the vote of Ohio citizens, which clearly indicates the position of YOUR CONSTITUENTS when it comes to attacking collective bargaining and workers' rights. With the passage of this bill, Ohio higher educational institutions will lose enrollment, researchers, and scholars, employers and businesses will lose future employees, and the State of Ohio will lose our competitive global edge because our schools will be grossly limited in what they can offer a student population that is as diverse as the society they live in. Please remember, voters have long memories and your opposition to this bill will be remembered, as will your support. I implore you to choose wisely and oppose Senate Bill 1.

Respectfully submitted in opposition of Senate Bill 1,

Rachel M. Stehle, Ph.D