

Testimony of **Professor Melissa M Soto-Schwartz**  
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 Melissa Soto-Schwartz, and I am a professor of history and women's and gender studies at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for 27 years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen and a proud mother of an OSU alumni, and an active member in my local political community in Cleveland. Last year I was active in lobbying against the passage of Senate Bill 83 because of its inherent flaws and today I am back again to remind this legislative body of precisely why such governmental overreach into higher education and labor is not only detrimental to the core values and principles of America, but it is also dangerous and most likely illegal.

I am extremely disturbed by several components in this proposed legislation. This bill imposes unreasonable restrictions on hiring faculty and limits the protections of tenure. It forces a narrow definition of intellectual diversity that might disrupt teaching based on evidence. The bill attempts to control course syllabi, scrutinize faculty for ideological alignment, and dismantle crucial diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs that make learning more accessible and fairer. Most concerning, it threatens institutional funding with unclear ideological standards. By dictating teaching methods and content, this bill undermines Ohio's ability to attract excellent educators and students. We do not want Ohio to become the next Florida which has now become

an outlier regarding academic rigor and validity. Ohio's higher education system should thrive on intellectual freedom, not political control.

I am also deeply concerned about the bill's threat to organized labor. Americans have a legal right to collective bargaining. The bill prohibits numerous collective bargaining subjects, setting a dangerous precedent. Any steps to weaken workers' rights is a step to weaken all our rights. Americans also have a fundamental right to free speech. Much of what has been proposed in this legislation is a form of censorship and a violation of the First Amendment. Ohio legislators are not content experts and should not be dictating what faculty can say in their classrooms, do with their course curriculum, syllabi, or the rubrics for faculty or course evaluations. Legislators lack the necessary graduate training and expertise in pedagogy.

In sum, SB 1 is yet another attempt to weaponize the Ohio legislature in the culture wars against higher education for Republican talking points. Why must our students, taxpayers, employers, and parents pay the cost when we lose talented people who flee the state looking to find affirmation and truth in education? The brain drain in Ohio is real and you can either take action to stem it or abet it. I urge you to stem it and vote no against this bill.

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