

Testimony of Summer McLain
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce & Higher Education Committee,

My name is Summer McLain, and I am an alumna and employee at The Ohio State University. I first presented the following testimony on Tuesday, February 11th during the 8.5-hour Senate Higher Education Committee hearing on Senate Bill 1. Despite the oral and written testimony of over 800 Ohioans, including faculty, staff, students who would be most harmed by this bill, the committee voted to advance it out of committee and the bill later passed the full Senate.

In his sponsor testimony before this committee, Senator Jerry Cirino claimed, "Contrary to the reckless predictions of opponents, faculty and students will rush to Ohio because we will have established an environment of true diversity of thought."

And to that / say: Perhaps you should listen to what the people who live, work, and learn at Ohio's public colleges and universities are *repeatedly* telling you. We speak as one voice. Not a single public college or university student testified in favor of this bill. Not one. But hundreds of students and professors have taken time away from teaching and learning to testify and protest this egregious and short-sighted attack on higher education and collective bargaining. We the people know what Senator Cirino and the majority of Senate Republicans refuse to believe. Senate Bill 1 will drive the best and brightest out of Ohio.

I ask that you do what your colleagues would not: listen to the people of Ohio, and take time to read my full testimony below.

My name is Summer McLain, and I am an employee at The Ohio State University, but I'm writing as an individual whose life has been transformed by the institution I now work for.

I was a first-generation college student from rural western Ohio and valedictorian of my 2015 graduating class. When it came time to apply for college, I applied to only one place, because I believed in its reputation, its commitment to academic excellence, and its legacy of providing opportunity for students from all walks of life.

I was fortunate to receive a full tuition scholarship called the Land Grant Opportunity Scholarship, which is based on both academic merit and economic need (by the way, SES is included when we talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion), which made it possible for me to attend college without the crushing debt.

After completing my undergraduate degree in 2019 – Summa Cum Laude – with a degree in Agriscience Education, **I made the decision to stay at this institution** to pursue my master's degree. As a graduate student, I assisted with research on the experiences of female faculty in agricultural colleges and explored attitudes toward mental health in agricultural education. I suspect these projects would have been stifled had Senate Bill 1 been in place at the time.

When I graduated with my master's in 2021 – a Distinguished Graduate in my department – **I stayed again**, accepting a grant-funded position as an instructional designer developing low-cost, accessible, workforce development courses for Ohioans, eventually moving into a permanent role.

And last year when I was recruited by a private company outside Ohio and offered a position out of over 200 candidates and a significant raise, **I chose to stay**. Because I believe in the work I do here.

I love this state and its public universities, **and I want to stay**. But if Senate Bill 1 passes, for the first time in my life, I will feel ashamed to work at an institution and in a state that does not value diversity, equity, and inclusion as I do.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are not about discrimination or exclusion, but about creating a campus where every individual, regardless of their background, beliefs, or politics, feels empowered to succeed. I have seen firsthand the power of diverse voices coming together to challenge conventional thinking and generate creative solutions.

SB 1 directly undermines its own stated goal - intellectual diversity. This bill would, in fact, suppress the diverse ideas and perspectives that allow our institutions to thrive. And SB 1's attack on collective bargaining will hinder our ability to attract and retain top talent. We will lose experts and thought leaders—the very people who make our universities competitive on a global stage—the talent that drives innovation, advances research, and contributes to our economy.

In my time at university, I never once felt my ideas were unwelcome or less than, no matter their political leaning. And those who know me will tell you my values and politics have grown and changed as I have over the years. But instead, I was taught to think critically and to make up my own mind. It's the professors I trust to teach and to remain impartial in their approach.

I ask that you consider the implications of this bill. It's not just students, faculty, and staff you'll be letting down, but all Ohioans who benefit from university research, engagement, and outreach. People like me *will* be pushed out.

And Ohio needs people like me.