Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 1

March 10, 2025

Members of the Committee,

I am speaking for myself, not on behalf of my employer or union, as a voting constituent, college professor, and member of the Columbus State Educational Association.

I am here today because I, like you, value rigorous education, diverse perspectives, and the freedom to explore ideas in higher education. In my 20 year career, I've seen firsthand the importance of ensuring that students are exposed to a wide range of viewpoints and that faculty can teach without political interference. Unfortunately, while I know Senate Bill 1 is well-intended, I fear that it will have unintended consequences that threaten the very intellectual diversity and fairness it seeks to promote.

One of my biggest concerns is that this bill could create an environment where faculty—especially those with unpopular or challenging viewpoints—will begin to self-censor out of fear. We should be encouraging open discussion and debate in the classroom, not creating a system where faculty are constantly looking over their shoulders. I am particularly concerned for my conservative colleagues, who often take intellectual risks by teaching perspectives that challenge a TikTok version of reality. Instead of protecting free speech, this bill could inadvertently make it easier for faculty to be punished for simply engaging in robust debate.

Specifically, you are setting up a system in which student, peer, and faculty evaluations could potentially be weaponized without much consideration for who is likely to be harmed. I suspect that you're envisioning a system where a small group of mostly conservative students might fight against the biased academy. But, I can tell you, from experience as a teaching professor on an urban campus, the reality is that a large majority of our students are much more progressive and much more diverse than the faculty. It is entirely possible, then, that evaluations could be weaponized against the very faculty you would seek to protect. It is our most conservative professors, many of whom also teach some of the most difficult courses, that will be the most at risk on our campus and in our current political environment by the student, peer, and faculty evaluation systems you seek to set in place.

I don't want any of my wonderful colleagues in all their diversity of thought to have their tenure threatened because of a weaponized system of evaluations, or out of fear for their jobs to begin to self-censor in the classroom or the hallways. We are all teaching the foundational knowledge in our disciplines because we value the pursuit of knowledge.

So, I urge you to pause and reconsider the unintended consequences of this bill. Before moving forward, come to our classrooms and see how our economists, sociologists, political scientists and historians already teach the foundations of our disciplines, including civics, and ensure that any reforms truly protect a broad range of viewpoints. Let's find solutions that actually enhance fairness and open inquiry in our classrooms. It can be done without eroding tenure, collective bargaining rights, or academic freedom. My department is proof.

Respectfully,

Mary Reiter