

Testimony of Courtney Lefebvre Little
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Dear Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Courtney Lefebvre Little, and I live and work at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I do not represent Ohio University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I am writing to express my concerns about the economic impact that Senate Bill 1 will have on Southeast Ohio, particularly in the Appalachian region. While I appreciate the state's recent investments in our communities—such as the Appalachian Community Grant Program—this bill would undermine those efforts by placing our colleges and universities at a competitive disadvantage, ultimately stifling economic growth in a region that needs it most.

Higher education is one of our region's strongest economic drivers. Colleges and universities in Southeast Ohio attract students, faculty, and staff from across the country, bringing critical dollars into local businesses, housing markets, and public services. By eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and restricting universities' ability to support students of all backgrounds, Senate Bill 1 makes Ohio's institutions less attractive to prospective students and faculty, leading to declines in enrollment, hiring, and retention. Fewer students mean less tuition revenue, but also less consumer spending in our local economies—restaurants, landlords, retail stores, and service providers all depend on the spending power that higher education brings to the region.

This bill will also make it harder to retain and develop regional talent. As Ohio faces workforce shortages in key industries, higher education plays a crucial role in preparing and keeping skilled professionals in our state. If our institutions lose their ability to recruit a diverse student body and workforce, we risk losing top talent to other states—states that are actively investing in higher education to fuel economic growth. Senate Bill 1 will make it harder to sustain the very workforce development efforts that are essential to Appalachia's long-term prosperity.

An economic impact study recently conducted for Ohio University indicates that Ohio University, its students and statewide alumni added \$2.9 billion in income to the state economy in 2016-17. That represents 0.5 percent of Ohio's total Gross State Product and supported 40,021 jobs statewide.

At a time when this administration has prioritized investment in Appalachian communities, it is counterproductive to enact policies that would weaken one of the most significant economic engines we have. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1 and instead support policies that strengthen, rather than weaken, our regional economic future.

Thank you for your time and leadership on behalf of our communities.

Sincerely,

Courtney