

Testimony of Adam I. Keller, Ph.D.  
Before the House Higher Education and Workforce Committee  
Representative Tom Young, Chair

March 11, 2025

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony as President of the Columbus State Education Association and a dedicated faculty member in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1. I do not speak on behalf of Columbus State Community College. This bill would weaken higher education, harm faculty, and disrupt our ability to serve Ohio's workforce.

SB1 bans required DEI training, but doing so threatens our accreditation and workforce partnerships. Ohio employers, particularly in STEM fields, demand a diverse workforce with the soft skills to lead and succeed in multicultural environments. The Higher Learning Commission requires us to demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse student populations.<sup>1</sup> Without this, we risk losing critical workforce partnerships and funding—jeopardizing programs that prepare students for in-demand careers.

SB1 also contradicts itself by eliminating DEI training (thus bias training) while requiring faculty evaluations based on whether classrooms are 'free of bias.' How can faculty ensure a bias-free environment if the training to recognize and address bias is banned? Further, student evaluations would now play a role in faculty evaluations. With 66% of Gen Z voters identifying as Democrats<sup>2</sup>, our conservative faculty—who this bill assumingly seeks to protect—may be most vulnerable to student complaints in evaluations.

This bill's standardized faculty evaluation metrics are also problematic. Higher education is not a factory-line process—faculty teach vastly different subjects, from upper-level chemistry to hands-on medical training. Applying a one-size-fits-all evaluation model will fail to measure actual faculty effectiveness and discourage innovation in teaching, research, and service. This bill promotes "working to the rule."

Additionally, SB1 strips faculty unions of collective bargaining power and prohibits strike, a concept rejected by the voters in 2011 by 62%.<sup>3</sup> Faculty and administration work together - with transparency and mutual understanding - to solve problems, to serve students and to serve regional employers. Undermining faculty's ability to negotiate working conditions - while preserving the employer's flexibility to address emergent scenarios - will drive talented educators out of Ohio and make it even harder to recruit skilled professionals into teaching. What educators are paid at community colleges is not drawing qualified faculty, so what will be the draw once you remove these protections? Does this committee agree with the bill's sponsor in that faculty are an irrelevant third-party with respect to students' education? Ironically, the bill also prohibits faculty

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hlcommission.org/accreditation/policies/criteria/2020-criteria/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/age-generational-cohorts-and-party-identification/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sos.state.oh.us/elections/election-results-and-data/2011-elections-results/state-issue-2-november-8-2011/>

strikes because faculty are “mission critical to Ohio’s economy.”<sup>4</sup> So, which is it, because both sentiments cannot be simultaneously true.

Finally, this bill adds millions of dollars in unnecessary bureaucracy at a time when higher education is already underfunded. It does nothing to improve faculty retention, or support student success. Instead, it would inflate degree requirements, forcing our BSN nursing students, for example, to take additional semesters to graduate because of a required civics course, worsening shortages in critical fields. It should be noted, the bill’s author stood in front of this committee and said “If a high school course mirrors this civics course, then they do not have to take it.” However, this is simply not true according to the lines 850-857: only AP credit or a college-level course may satisfy this requirement.

I urge you to oppose this bill and instead work with educators to support real solutions for higher education—ones that help students succeed rather than impose costly, partisan restrictions.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Senator Jerry Cirino, Testimony before the House Higher Education and Workforce Committee, March 4, 2025