

Testimony of Andrea Ford, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
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 Andrea Ford, and I am an assistant professor in Communication Sciences and Disorders (speech therapy) at the University of Cincinnati. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I want to express my **strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB 1)**. This bill would negatively impact the people and state of Ohio in the following ways:

1. It would threaten Ohio's reputation for academic excellence.

Eliminating the ability to offer DEI coursework and clinical experience would jeopardize the accreditationⁱ of our speech-language pathology program at the University of Cincinnati—as well as the eight other public university programs in Ohio.

Why does it matter? Ohio universities would lose competitiveness compared to institutions in other states that continue to prioritize DEI and accreditation. Faculty would leave for states where they can continue teaching comprehensive, accredited coursework. (We are already seeing this in states like Texas, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina that have enacted similar bills and are struggling to recruit and keep talented, top-tier faculty and researchersⁱⁱ.) The imposed constraints on delivering the curriculum required for credentialing pose a significant threat to Ohio's reputation for innovation in speech-language pathology and, more broadly, its reputation for academic excellence.

2. It would diminish the quality of speech therapy delivered to the Ohio population.

I teach students who will be serving individuals from a range of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, including those who are deaf/hard of hearing, or who have Down syndrome, developmental language disorders, aphasia, and traumatic brain injury. Eliminating DEI and intellectual diversity would significantly limit my (and my colleagues') ability to adequately prepare the next generation of speech-language pathologists for the patients they will encounter in professional practice here in Ohio.

Why does it matter? Ohio would eventually fall behind other states in providing high-quality speech and hearing services, affecting not only patient care, but our state's reputation and ability to attract talent. If SB 1 is enacted, we risk creating a workforce of practitioners who cannot provide high-quality care due to a lack of training in the needs of the populations they serve.

3. It would trigger a domino effect that ultimately would harm Ohio's residents and workforce.

Prospective students would be discouraged from enrolling in unaccredited programs, initially leading to a decline in tuition revenue for universities. (The University of Cincinnati alone is a large research institution that draws students into Ohio from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 133 countries outside of the US. Approximately 80% of these students remain in

Ohio after graduating and contribute to our economic success.) Eventually, fewer graduates would enter schools, clinics, and hospitals across Ohio, creating a shortfall of qualified professionals.

Why does it matter? Residents of Ohio—the students, clients, patients, and families who elected you and who we serve—would suffer. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that Ohio will have roughly 490 speech-language pathologist openings in 2025 with a 20% increase expected by 2032ⁱⁱⁱ. With fewer students graduating into Ohio’s workforce, we would be unable to meet that need. Wait times for speech and hearing services in schools, hospitals, and clinics would skyrocket. This worsening shortage would strain the system and have lasting, harmful consequences for those in need of timely care.

I love this state and its people. I urge you to vote for Ohio’s future by opposing SB 1 and supporting policies that uphold our academic freedom and, therefore, our credibility and ability to attract students whose work ultimately strengthens Ohio’s economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss further how **voting against SB 1** would best support our students, the communities we serve in Ohio, and the reputation of our public higher education institutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea Ford". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Andrea" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Ford".

Andrea Ford, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

ⁱ Our credentialing body “requires that audiologists and SLPs practice in a manner that considers the impact of cultural variables and language exposure and acquisition on the individual and their family...to provide the most effective assessment and intervention services.” Standard IV-G indicates that the applicant must have demonstrated knowledge of contemporary professional issues, including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and cultural competency. (<https://www.asha.org/certification/2020-slp-certification-standards/>)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.highereddive.com/news/aaup-two-thirds-of-southern-faculty-would-not-recommend-their-state/693042/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://projectionscentral.org/shortterm> and <https://www.bls.gov/emp/>