

Testimony of Erin G. Prestwich, Ph.D.
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

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

My name is Erin G. Prestwich, Ph.D. am a professor of Medicinal and Biological Chemistry at The University of Toledo, where I have taught for over eight years. I do not represent the University of Toledo, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

We need more people in health care in Ohio, but SB 1 would make it difficult for students to learn in the pharmaceutical sciences. Science should not be politicized, but that is exactly what happens by bills like SB 1. I study vaccines, which are important for people do be healthy. In the last few years, vaccines have become controversial, when they should not be. For health, the institution and college should endorse vaccines and should teach the importance of vaccines. Vaccines are one of the primary reasons that people are living longer. This is one example, but there are many (climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion) are others. Professors should not be required to teach opinions that have not been proven and should be able to talk about things that are potentially controversial. Bills like this harm free speech, which is the opposite of what education should be about.

SB 1 would significantly limits the ability for Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences programs to appropriately educate and train students for a diverse population of clients, patients, and students. Providing person- and family-centered, culturally relevant care is important to achieving best outcomes in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Future health, science, and education professionals must be educated to address the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence health including at the individual, system, and population levels.

Bills like this are harmful to the states where they are passed. They significantly increase campus censorship; they discourage students from coming to the colleges where they are enacted; they drive away talented faculty. These are the facts we now know about such bills.

We are now surer than we were last year that a decimation of higher education on this scale will inevitably have a negative impact on the state of Ohio. Rather than "affirming its commitment to intellectual diversity and free speech," this bill actually does the opposite of what it says it is trying to accomplish. This bill causes undue external pressure or interference of academic freedom, censor speech, harm inclusive education, and will hurt students, higher education, and Ohio. For that reason, I urge you reject this bill.

At a time when all Ohio colleges understand the threat of the coming enrollment cliff, Florida has demonstrated that these policies will only drive students out of the state; nearly 13% of Florida seniors said they won't even consider attending college in Florida because of policies like SB 1. Ohioans do not want that. These are students who will never come back to start businesses and raise families when they leave. And while a few students may complain about a few faculty today, in Florida today, 78% of students going to college are concerned that they're going to get a

substandard education; that's an overwhelming consensus.¹ The number of students outraged by that bill, makes it clear that the same results will follow here. And as we now also know, faculty will not tolerate diminished job protections and an increasingly censorious environment if they just want to do their jobs. The AAUP's 2023 report on Florida found that the new laws in Florida (similar to SB 1) are widely understood by faculty across the board as a "politically and ideologically driven assault" on higher education.² It goes without saying that this bill guts worker protections and is a clear attack on unions across the state, all of which have strongly, repeatedly and firmly opposed the bill. It is troubling that lawmakers who are supposed to be improving the wealth and prosperity of the region would try so hard to jeopardize Ohio's prosperity in this way.

The bill was objected to by over 1,000 students and faculty members in the senate. Last session, Ohio's representatives did the right thing by defeating this bill. And now you have the opportunity to do so again. I encourage you to do so; defeat this bill.

Sincerely,

Erin Prestwich, Ph.D.

¹ <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/desantis-florida-education/>

² <https://www.aaup.org/report/report-special-committee-political-interference-and-academic-freedom-florida%E2%80%99s-public-higher?>