

Testimony of Katie Winters, PhD, CCC-SLP
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 Katie Winters, and I am an assistant professor and speech-language pathologist at the University of Cincinnati where I teach and conduct research. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati and rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 (SB 1). This bill is dangerous, and, if passed in its current form, will result in devastating adverse impacts to public university finances and to public university students, staff, and faculty.

This bill is bad for the budget. A cursory internet search shows the University of Cincinnati made approximately \$643 million in tuition and fees during the 2023 fiscal year, which is approximately 40% of the university's operating budget. Almost all the students I teach at the undergraduate and graduate level pay in-state tuition. The Ohio Department of Education offers tuition reciprocity agreements with three nearby states – Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia – where students who are Ohio residents may attend almost 20 out-of-state universities and pay in-state tuition. **Students who oppose any of the tenants of SB 1 do not need to pursue higher education in the state of Ohio for affordable tuition pricing, and they will spend their tuition dollars elsewhere.** I cannot in good faith advise my students to remain in the state of Ohio, or mentor prospective students to move to Ohio to pay out-of-state tuition, when academic programs are under the high risk of termination through SB 1's retrenchment policies and degree program elimination policies. **How are students to know a program they are interested in will exist by the time they graduate?**

This bill is bad for students and their futures post-graduation. SB 1 requires intellectual diversity yet restricts diversity, equity, and inclusion. I assure you that varied opinions and perspectives are already present and valued in my classroom. In fact, in my graduate stuttering class my students have an assignment in which they take on others' perspectives about defining stuttering as a disorder, disability, or a form of neuro**diversity** (i.e., an acceptable communication difference) and how those definitions alter intervention and accommodation priorities for those individuals. I understand from February's opposition testimony that Sen. Cirino stated he does not intend to limit the content faculty cover in their courses specifically; however, it is unwise and irresponsible to assume that limiting language on college campuses generally (e.g., through DEI programs, student organizations, trainings) will not have an impact on what students feel permitted to discuss in their classrooms.

In my field, diversity, equity, and inclusion applies not only to identity characteristics such as race or language background but also to neurodiversity and accessibility for children and adults with neurodevelopment disabilities. These populations – including but not limited to stuttering and autism – need speech-language pathologists who understand their clinical profile from varied perspectives, **which includes how their diagnosis intersects within topics of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.** If SB 1 is passed, healthcare and allied health services that require this training, including speech-language pathology, will suffer in the state of Ohio. Both children and adults who are born with or later acquire communication disabilities or disorders will receive care from professionals who have not been trained in all aspects of these clinical populations, and as a result **these services will decrease in quality and patient and family satisfaction.** Though I disagree with several tenants of this bill, **a primary concern is that there are no protections for accredited programs that need to teach on topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion,** which is something that was present in previous iterations of this bill.

This bill is bad for faculty and staff. I moved to Ohio for a tenure-track faculty position at a public university. Many tenure-track and tenured faculty are like me. They are researchers who move across the country for their academic appointments. SB 1 eliminates academic freedom and it removes protections of tenure, which is a professional milestone I am committed to achieving. Like many other tenure-track faculty, the implications of this bill have me considering if I will need to move in order to meet my professional goals and work in an environment that values my contributions to the academy.

In my research methods class, I teach my students about the Code of Ethics of the American Speech Language and Hearing Association or ASHA, the national organization for speech-language pathologists and audiologists. I also teach them about the Belmont Report. These guidelines outline basic ethical principles for clinical practice in speech-language pathology and audiology and for research practices. In these documents, the authors mention what SB 1 defines as “controversial” topics. In this context, researchers and healthcare providers are tasked with providing ethical care and consideration to groups at greater risk, such as children or women who are pregnant, and with not discriminating against individuals who fall into some category of diversity based on age, disability, gender, culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Eliminating “controversial” topics from the classroom and from university organizations that provide equitable care and consideration to our most vulnerable makes it impossible for me to teach content students need to critically appraise research in their field. The words diversity, equity, and inclusion are not inherently controversial, but the actions of SB 1 and implications for higher education are.

I can say with full confidence that if SB 1 was law when I was applying for academic jobs, I would not have applied to any institutions in Ohio. If SB 1 is passed, I have no doubt that public universities will struggle to recruit and retain quality faculty to teach and conduct research, and Ohio will fall behind other states in higher education. This is not solely a problem for higher education – low quality education will have cascading negative effects for Ohio workers post-graduation.

I urge you to stop SB 1 and its threat to Ohio's higher education, finances, and future healthcare services. **I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.