

Testimony of Erin Susick
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 Susick, and I am a professor of mathematics at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught since 2018. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it represents an interference into higher education that threatens academic freedom, shared governance, and the ability of institutions to teach students effectively.

Academic freedom is the cornerstone of an effective education, and, at my community college, we already have a strong commitment to it as well as intellectual diversity. Our students come from various backgrounds and encompass a wide range of ages, which makes for an amazing classroom environment. When I teach statistics, I love to use examples from a student's major, current events, politics, sports, and music to help students understand data analysis concepts and think critically. It is through my academic freedom as a professor that I can engage students in the material for the course by using topics that are interesting to them. For example, political polling is a great way to explain confidence intervals and margin of error. In the 2024 Presidential election, one poll predicted that President Trump was expected to get approximately 47% of the votes with a margin of error of 3%. What does that mean? How were those values calculated? What actually happened in the election? We can also discuss how political polling is conducted and talk about the benefits and issues involved. This can bring up a lot of different thoughts and opinions, but we are able to have a discussion with room for disagreement, while explicitly stating the current best practices in the field of statistics. I am not teaching students *what* to think when they analyze data but rather teaching them to *understand* a variety of tools and methods that they can choose to use when analyzing data.

In the spring of 2021, I was nominated by students for the Ralph M. Besse Award for Excellence in Teaching. I won this award, and the most meaningful part of it was the comments from my students. They illustrate the impact that a professor can have on students and *what actually happens* in our classrooms. Here are some examples:

How did this person help you to grow intellectually or professionally through their teaching?

They encourage questions and discussion in every class and are always prompt with responding to emails.

Describe specific examples of how this person has helped you in and out of the classroom.

She puts real world problems to our material and helps us gain the tools to handle math and financial problems that we face!!

Describe specifically how this person impacted or inspired you academically or personally.

She teaches us that people who don't think they're good at math can be and that through practice we can love math as well.

Explain how this person motivated, encouraged, or engaged you through their teaching.

They are willing to learn alongside us as students.

In talking with my colleagues about their classes and even visiting them as a guest, I have seen a similar commitment to students. They are intensely passionate about teaching, their subject matter and helping our students learn. This would be compromised with the passage of Senate Bill 1, as it encourages students and colleagues to file complaints against anyone at the college that allegedly interferes with intellectual diversity rights. All views would be subject to complaint, conservative and liberal alike, and it would have a chilling effect on the classroom environment.

Though Senator Cirino claims to support diverse student viewpoints by sponsoring this bill, his comments about students protesting Senate Bill 1 show the opposite. He stated, "The students that were out here protesting are probably getting extra credit for being here. I don't believe that they have studied the bill and all the implications of this legislation and the impact on higher education in Ohio. I believe that they were asked to be here by their professors." (Henry, 2025, para. 25) His comment shows a fundamental lack of understanding of what goes on in our classrooms. Again, our job as educators is not to teach students what to think or to provide them with extra credit opportunities. We want them to complete their assignments and have a deeper understanding of the required material for the course. Senator Cirino's comments also demonstrate a lack of respect for students' dissenting opinions as well as a disregard of a students' ability to research a topic, think critically, and come to their own conclusions.

In addition to this bill targeting the free speech of professors and students, it also targets the speech of institutions of higher education. It prevents schools from endorsing or opposing any controversial belief or policy. Even though Senate Bill 1 is not law currently, it has already stifled their speech. Senator Cirino has taken Ohio college presidents' silence on the bill as consent; however, he has explicitly threatened to take away funding to colleges that oppose the bill. Many of our schools rely heavily on state funding and have vulnerable subsets of students that rely on it as well. Because Senator Cirino is the Chair of the Finance committee, they have taken his threats seriously. He has silenced them.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 1 seeks to legislate policies that are *already in place* at colleges using shared governance and/or a collective bargaining agreement, such as faculty evaluations, tenure, conditions for striking, and retrenchment. College administration and faculty are best suited to develop these policies together *collaboratively* as they are the ones who understand student and program needs as well as the mission and strategic plan for the school. We have a robust faculty evaluation procedure that includes classroom observations by the dean, peer evaluation, and student evaluation. The purpose of our evaluation process is to "document faculty effectiveness and establish a basis for professional development" (CCC-AAUP Contract, Section 26.01). These evaluations happen more frequently for professors in the tenure-track, as the college is determining faculty competence. Our tenure policy is a very rigorous five-year process that requires professors to "demonstrate teaching ability, creative achievement, academic integrity and professional service to the college" (CCC-AAUP Contract, Section 37.02). Unlike the misconception that tenure is a guarantee of lifetime employment, tenured faculty "may be terminated due to retrenchment or just cause" (CCC-AAUP Contract, Section 37.02). We also have a policy for retrenchment that determines how and in what order to reduce the number of faculty at the college (CCC-AAUP Contract, Articles 7 and 8). Lastly, we are only permitted to strike if we are without a contract (CCC-AAUP Contract, Section 34.01). That could only potentially happen once every three years and has not happened at all in the history of the college. Because these policies are already in place, this part of Senate Bill 1 is a waste of time and resources.

Ultimately, government intervention into the topics of our collective bargaining agreements weakens labor rights and labor unions across the state. Rather than repeating the mistakes of Senate Bill 5 by targeting all unions at the same time, Senate Bill 1 singles out higher education. Their hope is to take away our right to strike and bargain over working conditions first and then do the same to other unions.

I urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 1 or to consider the amendments proposed by the Ohio Conference of the AAUP.

Thank you. Again, I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

Sincerely,

Erin Susick

Henry, Megan. "Ohio GOP lawmaker again proposes to overhaul higher ed, ban diversity efforts and labor strikes." *Ohio Capital Journal*, January 23, 2025, <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/01/23/ohio-gop-lawmaker-again-proposes-to-overhaulhigher-ed-ban-diversity-efforts-and-labor-strikes/>

Cuyahoga Community College and The American Association of University Professors Cuyahoga Community College Chapter (CCC-AAUP). (2022). *Agreement between Cuyahoga Community College and the American Association of University Professor (AAUP), Cuyahoga Community College Chapter: August 16, 2022 to August 15, 2025*. <https://ccc-aaup.org/wp1/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/CCC-AAUP-2022-2025-CBA.pdf>