

**Testimony of Kate Budd, Professor of Art
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 Kate Budd. I am a Professor of Art, and chair of the faculty senate at the University of Akron. I do not represent UA, I am here to speak against the anti-collective bargaining measures in Sub. Senate Bill 1 as an individual.

Faculty do not want to strike. I served on the Akron-AAUP leadership team for twelve years and know this first hand. Faculty are committed to their student's success and understand the impact a strike would have on their learning. The only times they will consider striking are when the administration refuses to bargain, or won't bargain in good faith. It is very much the "nuclear option", and I hope to explain why having it as an option keeps campuses peaceful for the vast majority of the time.

UA is a case study in what happens during a difficult negotiation when faculty are prohibited from striking. In 2020, the UA administration asserted that the Covid pandemic had impacted the university's finances so badly that they had to make a reduction in force (or RIF) of 97 faculty.

Akron-AAUP believed that a RIF was unnecessary and would damage UA's academic mission, leading to a catastrophic drop in enrollment. But we were under contract and bound by a "no strike" clause. Our only hope for leverage at the table and to mitigate the damage of a RIF was to go public.

We held raucous rallies, saturated social media and got the attention of national and international news organizations. None of this public ugliness had any impact at the negotiating table and 97 faculty were ultimately RIF'd. The faculty-administration relationship was the worst I have seen in 26 years, morale across campus was terrible and I am sure the RIF and the public fight over it drove students away.

In early 2021, we negotiated a new contract. Our previous contract had expired and we could legally strike; this gave our team some leverage and we negotiated a contract that both sides could agree to. To avoid another RIF, the chapter recognized that the Administration had to be able to respond to rapidly changing circumstances, and we worked together to create a retrenchment article that made it easier to reduce faculty when necessary.

In November 2024, UA announced their intent to retrench 38 faculty. I am in one of the affected departments, and while being in a department undergoing retrenchment is stressful and difficult, the process is transparent and is being conducted in a much more humane way than the 2020 RIF.

Under the RIF, faculty questioned whether all the facts of their case had been properly considered, but there was no mechanism for making sure they had been. This lack of transparency and the perception that career-ending decisions were being made by a few individuals without the full facts added to the pain of the RIF and damaged the faculty-administration relationship. Our new retrenchment process gives affected departments the opportunity to provide evidence to a joint faculty-administration committee in support of their case.

Another important difference is that unlike the RIF, which terminated positions on the same day people were notified, retrenchment has a longer period of notice for those being retrenched of 3, 6 or 12 months, depending on length of service and tenure status. This is vital given how specialized the academic job market is and how long it takes to find a new position.

Note that there has been little to no public fighting about the current retrenchment, unlike the 2020 RIF.

The right to strike helps give faculty equality at the negotiating table. Equality at the table results in contracts that work for both “sides”, help keep universities accountable to their academic mission, provide stability and make the university desirable to prospective students. To attract and retain excellent faculty, you must offer working conditions that are fair and consistent with industry standards.

I ask that you consider my testimony and vote no on Sub. Senate Bill 1.

Thank you.