

Testimony of Pepper Stetler, Ph.D. Professor, Miami University
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
11 February 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Pepper Stetler and I am a professor of the History of Art and Architecture at Miami University, where I have taught for thirteen years. I do not represent Miami University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am deeply concerned that there is another attempt in the legislature to pass a new version of SB 83: "The Higher Education Destruction Act," despite the massive public opposition.

SB1 is the epitome of big government overreach. This bill would impose unprecedented levels of political interference and unnecessary micromanagement on Ohio's colleges and universities. They would severely undermine the integrity of our higher education system. This is why the bill faced strong bipartisan legislative opposition in the last session and failed to advance. This is not a partisan issue.

SB1 is a series of contradictions that claim to promote "intellectual diversity" while simultaneously attempting to legislate the manner in which certain topics can be addressed and the way in which professors manage their classrooms. Such proscriptions would have a chilling effect on academic freedom and would make it more difficult for Ohio's colleges and universities to attract and retain students and faculty. Ohio cannot afford this kind of brain drain.

SB1 contains at least 25 different issues areas, which would create an unprecedented number of unworkable mandates, most of which are simply more burdensome versions of what our colleges and universities already do. Giving administrators, faculty, and the chancellor more unfunded busywork takes away from student learning and adds to bureaucratic costs. None of this advances higher education.

The bill also attacks workers' rights by attempting to prohibit fundamental collective bargaining subjects and the right to strike. These provisions are a thinly veiled attempt to weaken the voices of faculty, who have every right to advocate for fair working conditions, which are the students' learning conditions. Ohioans have made it clear that we support collective bargaining rights.

There are real problems in higher education that we need to address: increased tuition and debt, student retention and completion, and drastic reductions in academic programs and full-time faculty positions. SB1 get at none of these pressing issues and will not add value to our colleges and universities. The Ohio Senate needs to “stay in their lane” and allow educators to do their jobs.

Respectfully, I ask that you reject these bills, which could do real, irreversible damage to Ohio higher education.