

	<h2 style="text-align: center;">HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE</h2>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Witness Form</p>

Today's Date February 10, 2025

Name: Megan E. Meuti Nicol

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Organization Representing: Self

Testifying on Bill Number: Ohio Senate Bill 1

Testimony: ☐ Verbal ☒ **Written** ☐ Both

Testifying As: ☐ Proponent ☒ **Opponent** ☐ Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist? ☐ Yes ☒ **No**

Special Requests: N/A

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10 February 2025

The Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, OH 43215

Subject: Testimony in Opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 1

Dear Members of the Ohio Senate,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Ohio Senate Bill 1. I am writing as a private citizen and an educator, and my views are my own; they do not represent those of my employer, The Ohio State University. I am deeply concerned about the provisions outlined in this bill and the profound negative impact they would have on higher education, intellectual freedom, and academic integrity in the state of Ohio.

First, the proposed elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices at state institutions will further entrench the marginalization and underrepresentation of individuals from diverse backgrounds in higher education. These offices provide critical support for students from historically underrepresented groups and create spaces where all students, faculty, and staff can engage in meaningful dialogue about equity and access. The removal of DEI initiatives will make our institutions less inclusive, thereby hindering the ability of students from diverse backgrounds to succeed and contribute to our academic community. As a woman in STEM, I have personally benefited from DEI initiatives and would not have the privilege of writing this letter as a tenured, Associate Professor.

Second, I am particularly concerned about the proposal to include a measure for assessing instructor bias on Student Evaluations of Instruction. Research has repeatedly shown that student evaluations are fraught with implicit and unconscious biases. Numerous studies demonstrate that women, minorities, and LGBTQ+ faculty members consistently receive lower ratings than their cisgender, heterosexual, white male counterparts, independent of actual teaching effectiveness. I have personally observed this trend in my own student evaluations where students have commented on everything from the sound of my voice to the clothes that I wear in the classroom. Moreover, students may conflate being challenged intellectually with perceived instructor bias, particularly when confronted with viewpoints that differ from their own. This measure would not ensure fairness or accuracy in faculty assessment but would rather exacerbate existing inequities in higher education.

Third, the bill discourages the teaching of climate change, despite the overwhelming consensus within the scientific community that it poses one of the greatest existential threats to humanity. **Climate change is not a matter of political opinion.** Instead, climate change is a scientifically established reality that requires urgent action. Restricting discussion on this issue undermines the very foundation of scientific education and leaves students ill-prepared to engage with the most pressing challenges of their generation. Suppressing knowledge about climate science is a disservice to both students and the public at large.

Fourth, the bill limits collaborations with researchers from China, a move that is counterproductive to the mission of higher education. Scientific discovery and technological innovation thrive on international

collaboration. Restricting partnerships with researchers based solely on nationality stifles intellectual progress and limits the ability of Ohio's institutions to engage with the global academic community. Such restrictions will not enhance national security but will instead isolate researchers in Ohio from critical advancements and opportunities for innovation.

Finally, the implementation of post-tenure review, as outlined in this bill, threatens the very principle of academic freedom that tenure is designed to protect. Tenure exists to ensure that faculty members can pursue research, teaching, and public engagement without fear of political or administrative retribution. By introducing a process that could be used to punish or silence faculty members for expressing controversial or unpopular views, this bill would undermine the ability of institutions to foster the free exchange of ideas, which is essential to intellectual advancement and a functioning democracy.

In conclusion, Ohio Senate Bill 1 presents significant threats to the integrity of higher education in our state. It weakens efforts toward diversity and inclusion, imposes biased and flawed faculty evaluation measures, discourages the teaching of well-established scientific facts, limits global academic collaboration, and jeopardizes the principle of academic freedom. I urge you to reject this bill and instead support policies that uphold the values of academic excellence, inclusion, and intellectual freedom that have long been the foundation of higher education in Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Megan E Meuti". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'E'.

Megan E. Meuti Nicol