

Testimony of Jeanie Lau  
Before the Higher Education Committee  
February 9, 2025

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Jeanie Lau, and I am a professor of Physics at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for 6 years. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am deeply troubled by Sec. 3345.451- 456. What introduced here are extremely detrimental to the higher education and student learning in the state of Ohio, for the following reasons:

1. These sections effectively removes tenure in public universities of Ohio. Tenure is the foundation of American higher education system, endowing faculty with the freedom to pursue knowledge, without pressure from political, religious, or commercial interests, or personal likes or dislikes of department chairs, deans, and other upper administrations.

In areas of science, technological, engineering and mathematics (STEM), **tenure also allow faculty to pursue challenging or high risk-high reward endeavors in research, such as those that led to the invention of laser and MRI, without worrying about “underperforming” in a number of years.**

2. To answer questions such as “none of the other jobs have job security; why should university professors be different”,

- unlike other jobs, university professors are in the profession of pursuing and creating new knowledge, which is best performed in an environment free from political, religious, commercial or hierarchical interests
- university professors are much underpaid, considering the 10+ years of post-college degree training needed to secure a faculty position, and comparing to their industrial counterparts. For example, I have been a professor for 20 years, and fresh PhD graduates from my group join Apple, Intel, Meta, or Applied Materials with starting salaries that are higher than my current compensation.
- The fact is that **university faculty is willing to accept the comparatively low salary because of the job security and academic freedom offered by tenure. Thus, to attract same talents without true tenure, OH universities will have to offer salaries that double or triple the current ones, in addition to facing brain drains to other states or other countries that have true tenure.** Such brain drain is very real and already happening -- universities in UK, Europe, and Australia are now seeing skyrocketing number of job applicants from the US.

3. **Should the bill pass, Ohio universities will not be able to attract top talents; worse yet, our best talents, who inevitably have no shortage of career options, will leave Ohio.** I can offer a personal example – I was recruited by OSU in 2017 as a full professor in University of California, to help OSU to focus on the area of quantum materials. If I had known that this bill would be proposed, I would have never moved.

4. **Using student evaluation as a part of the metrics for teaching performance is problematic and counter-productive.**

- Higher evaluation score does not mean that the students learn more or better. All instructors know that a sure way to secure high evaluation scores is to teach to the test and give out easy homeworks and exams. When your job security is linked to student evaluation, there will be huge incentives to teach to the test and water down the content. This will lead to graduates who are not as well-trained or learnt. In the coming years, the reputation of degrees from Ohio universities will be damaged.

5. Lastly, the last time the bill was introduced (as SB-83 in 2023), it has faced strong opposition from the public. It is clear that SB-1 is unpopular and runs contrary to the will of the people of Ohio.

For these reasons, I strongly believe that **the bill will do extensive and irreparable destruction to OH higher education, and to the training of a well-educated STEM work force. It is against the interest of the State of Ohio. I urge you not to move forward on this bill.**