

Testimony of Nicole Yadon, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 7, 2025

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

My name is Nicole Yadon, and I am a professor of Political Science at Ohio State University, where I have been employed for nearly five years. I do not represent Ohio State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I oppose SB1 because many of its provisions will serve to undercut OSU's mission and goals of academic excellence, as well as those of all public universities across the state of Ohio.

If we want students to come to universities in Ohio, like OSU, on the promise of receiving a first-class education, instructors need to be able to determine what is taught in their classroom, and how it is taught, without fear of punishment. One goal of higher education is to provide access to new information, perspectives, and people from different backgrounds, as well as to gain skills related to critical thinking and reasoning which are often refined in the classroom. The bill's intervention into determining what content can be discussed in courses and potentially punishing faculty for how we teach "controversial beliefs"—which are very broadly defined—is highly concerning and at odds with the goals of academic freedom and free speech. As someone who teaches on sensitive political topics, I see in my classroom that students *want* to debate, discuss, and learn from one another and about controversial issues. This is a regular component of my courses and students learn best from connecting scholarly materials to real-world events. SB1 threatens the viability of having such conversations out of fear that accusations of inappropriate discussion of "controversial beliefs" may occur. Stifling conversation in the classroom will reduce the extent to which students can learn and grow through their coursework, which will also have downstream impacts on their ability to communicate and engage with important but controversial issues beyond the classroom.

Similarly, if OSU is to maintain its status as a world-class institution, faculty need to have tenure protections that are not politicized or limited by accusations of a lack of intellectual diversity. Faculty, including those with tenure, are already assessed annually by their department in terms of both teaching and research quality, as well as service contributions. If faculty—including tenured faculty—are engaging in inappropriate behaviors or other forms of misconduct, the university reserves the right to fire them. Thus, tenure does not guarantee a lifetime appointment no matter their subsequent behavior, actions, etc. What tenure protections do afford, however, is confidence that faculty can build a research program free from the ever-changing whims of politicians or university bureaucrats who happen to hold power in a given political moment. It creates opportunity for stability and putting down roots for faculty have been deemed exceptional by their departmental and university colleagues, as well as a series of external evaluators. Tenure allows faculty to, for example, invest in recruiting and training the

highest quality graduate students, preparing those graduate students for academic and industry jobs, applying for nationally competitive funding sources, and producing cutting edge research via the often-interdisciplinary research teams developed at OSU.

Each of these benefits associated with tenure also benefit the University in terms of its reputation, revenue, and ability to continue recruiting/hiring the best faculty with an eye towards excellence. Without tenure protections and with a greater opportunity for retrenchment, OSU will not be able to successfully recruit or maintain top-tier faculty because such faculty will be looking for jobs in other places that maintain full tenure protections. This will leave OSU with an inability to maintain its reputation for academic excellence, worse rankings of academic quality by US News, challenges with recruiting students (particularly out-of-state or international students who are especially drawn in by university rankings), as well as reduced revenue for the university due to both enrollments and decreased grant funding. This would have meaningful consequences for the entire central Ohio community given that Ohio State is one of the largest employers in the area.

Consequently, I urge the committee to oppose SB1 given that it will undermine the opportunity for Ohio's college students to receive the highest quality education and irreparably damage the reputation of Ohio's great universities, in turn reducing enrollment, recruitment, and revenue.