

Testimony of Sara Stiltner

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11th , 2025

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

My name is Sara Stiltner, and I am a constituent of Ohio. I am a college graduate and have dedicated years of my life to the academic success of students and the health and well being of student athletes. I have worked in public higher education in a number of states including Ohio, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina and never have I experienced such an overreach of control within public higher education. Despite working in a variety of states at a number of institutions I keep coming back to Ohio as my personal Public Education at an institution of higher education in Ohio was one the most profound, enlightening, and cherished memories of my life. I do not represent any of my previous institutions, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I represent someone that has earned multiple degrees from public institutions of higher education and someone that has supported these institutions in my career journey. The autonomy this bill strips away from students and faculty is appalling. As an individual that has dedicated my training and career to developing clinicians and healthcare providers to restrict the autonomy of the educators over the curriculum is beneficial to no one. This is not beneficial to the state institution reputation, it is not of interest to the diverse patients these individuals will treat in the state of Ohio, and it is ultimately of no benefit to the bottom dollar of the state of Ohio. Should this bill gain further traction the institutional system of higher education in Ohio will suffer drastic reduction in programs offered, which results in faculty and staff unemployment, and declined enrollment in the institutions in Ohio. Stripping the power for students to make decisions based on the differences of institutions is a fundamental element to picking a college. Having all public institutions of Ohio be aligned with the same Mission, Vision, and Values will hinder the interest of both native Ohio students and students from the nation to attend institutions of higher education in the state.

The solution to mistrust of higher education nationally and more specifically Ohio should not be further oversight into the freedom of thought and expression, rather further support of higher education and the uniqueness our public institutions are instilled with. Currently Ohio is less than adequate to sister states in financial support of higher education which can be directly correlated to potential declines in enrollment (Wright State Retirees Association, 2024). This is a trend that began prior to the current legislature and continues to be impacted by current administration.

Rather than provoke further criticism of Ohio public institutions of higher education the state legislator should be concerned with keeping our college graduates in Ohio. The increasing unemployment rate and declining economy have stifled the interest of college graduates of public institutions and private institutions alike to stay and continue supporting their community despite 88% of these individuals reporting they are proud to be a college student of a public institution in Ohio (Fordham Institute, 2009).

For a legislature of individuals who overwhelmingly attended public institutions of Ohio and have the view to attack and stifle is baffling. A majority of the Education Committee graduated from public institutions in Ohio that allowed them to prosper in thought, allowed you the freedom to choose the clubs and groups you were a part of without criticism. Taking those opportunities away from the students will only hinder the public institutions of the state. I acknowledge not all members of the legislature attended or graduated from Ohio institutions or even public institutions, their misguided precedent for what higher education should be should concern this committee. Their drastic ideology of the acceptable cost of higher education should alarm all constituents.

With the national criticism of higher education “it's too expensive,” “there is not a big enough ROI” the answer is not to inundate these institutions, make them more expensive, and make them all look the same. Ohio currently has over 80 private or for-profit institutions, this is alarming considering the rate of public institutions and community colleges is just below 60. Public institutions and community colleges are more attainable for the common Ohio citizen, they are less threatening, the current DEI policies allow these individuals to afford a college education, allow them to choose the institution that is right for them based on institutional differences. The private, for-profit institutions are consistently the ones folding into one another, do not have the same appeal to faculty, staff, and students, and cost 3-6 times that of the public counterpart. This bill represents a drastic, unprecedented, and extreme ideology which is directly contradictory to what the bill intends to accomplish.

The autonomy of merit, promotion, curriculum, and bargaining should be at the discretion of the faculty, administrators, staff, and students who these decisions directly affect rather than those of private interest unrelated and untrained within higher education or even education in general. Having shared governance within an institution makes it successful, makes it impactful, and makes it thrive. This bill will effectively diminish, demote, and squash this process. I adamantly oppose this bill.

1. [Fordham Institute](#)

2. [Wright State Retiree Association](#)