

Testimony of Jennifer Vannest, PhD, MA, CCC-SLP
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 6, 2025

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

My name is Jennifer Vannest; I grew up and attended college in Ohio, I am a Cincinnati resident, and Professor at University of Cincinnati. I do not represent University of Cincinnati, but rather am **submitting testimony as a private citizen.**

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB1). Implementation of the policies proposed in SB1 will have a dramatically negative effect on Higher Education in the state of Ohio. While this bill purports to protect intellectual freedom for students and faculty, exactly the opposite is the case. Limits on the discussion of “controversial topics” will stifle the presentation of important information across domains of science, literature, history, and social studies.

Limits on programs supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) will also hurt our students. I urge you to consider that these programs create opportunities for a broad range of individuals, including first-generation college students, veterans, people with disabilities, and racial/ethnic groups that have been under-represented in higher education.

In addition, the inability to educate students on issues related to DEI may impact the accreditation of programs that require accreditation from a national organization (such as the graduate program in which I teach, in Speech-Language Pathology). As educators of future healthcare professionals, we teach students how to work with individuals with disabilities and those recovering from injuries. Being able to discuss the diverse challenges faced and perspectives of these individuals is absolutely crucial to our success in preparing students for the success in their profession.

These changes, along with removal of the ability of faculty to strike, and changes to post-tenure review will impact faculty’s ability to advocate for their students, and also create a “brain-drain” of qualified faculty to states other than Ohio.

I urge our legislators to oppose this bill.