

Testimony of Carrie Rountrey, Ph.D., CCC-SLP  
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair  
10 February, 2025

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

My name is Carrie Rountrey, and I am a professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for since 2019. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I aim to concisely express my **strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB 1)** as a citizen, a community member of Cincinnati, the mother of a college student pursuing a profession in healthcare, and the mother of a soon-to-be 18-year-old son who I was lucky enough to adopt from foster care and who is Black.

As an educator in higher education, and as the mother of college-aged boys, I am gravely concerned about the potential consequences this bill would have on academic freedom, educational quality, tenure protections, and the well-being of students from diverse backgrounds.

As a faculty member who has dedicated my career to fostering critical thinking, innovation, and informed citizenship in future clinicians, I fear that SB 1 undermines the foundational principles of higher education. The bill's push for political oversight over curriculum and faculty decisions threatens to stifle intellectual diversity and limit students' ability to engage in open, meaningful discourse. The classroom should be a space for exploration and respectful debate, not a venue for state-imposed ideology. Ironically, the bill also removes our ability to peacefully protest this by considering a strike.

One of the most troubling aspects of the bill is its potential impact on tenure. Tenure is a cornerstone of academic freedom and a protector and motivator of scientific advances. Tenure ensures that educators can pursue research and express ideas without fear of political retaliation or undue interference. Weakening tenure protections would deter talented faculty from coming to or staying in Ohio institutions, thereby diminishing the quality of education and research. A robust tenure system also allows universities to attract top scholars and maintain a competitive edge in innovation and intellectual contributions.

Moreover, and most importantly, as the mother of college-aged children who are mixed-race and Black, I am particularly troubled by provisions in the bill that may curtail efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. Indeed, my son, who is in the Air Force ROTC with hopes to be commissioned as an officer when he graduates with a nursing

degree, has already had communications secondary to recent executive orders that clubs and networking opportunities are being disbanded, including some clubs that promote foreign language learning for American students, a needed skill for many, especially for students hoping to serve in the military! My children, like so many other students of color, deserve to feel seen, valued and supported as they pursue their education. Initiatives that address racial and cultural disparities are not about exclusion or division; they are about creating environments where ALL students can thrive TOGETHER.

Diversity in higher education enriches the learning experience for everyone. It prepares students to succeed in an increasingly global workforce and cultivates empathy, cultural awareness, and critical problem-solving skills. Dissolving programs that advance these objectives would be a disservice to all students, regardless of their background. For my sons, who aim to serve in the military, these skills may make the difference between life and death, as they put their lives in their country's hands.

I also worry about the negative effect this bill will have on attracting and retaining top talent in Ohio's higher education system. Professors and researchers seek environments where academic freedom is protected, and where their work can contribute meaningfully to society without political interference. Indeed, I already have colleagues who are considering exit plans to academic positions in other states where these protections exist. This means they are willing to uproot their careers and families so that their talents can be used elsewhere. I am considering my own next move. SB 1 threatens Ohio's reputation as a hub for academic excellence and innovation.

For the sake of Ohio's future – for its students, educators, and the broader community – I urge you to oppose SB 1. Instead, I encourage lawmakers to support initiatives that empower our higher education institutions to remain inclusive, forward-thinking, and free from political influence.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie E. Rountrey".

Carrie Rountrey, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Assistant Professor, University of Cincinnati

Community Member and Mother, City of Cincinnati