

Dr. Molly Burke – Written Testimony, opposing SB1

I am writing testimony today in opposition of SB1. This bill is bad for Ohioans. This overly broad and extremely controversial bill strips universities of their ability to educate students and imposes unconstitutional restrictions on their First Amendment freedoms. I have outlined some of the issues below.

Striking: The bill would prohibit faculty strikes at public universities. As we are reaching a breaking point in higher education, the issues to not lay with faculty, preventing faculty from organizing to better their work conditions for themselves, their students, and peers is unfair and undemocratic.

Tenure: The bill would end tenure in Ohio and give administrators the power to fire faculty. Ending tenure is problematic, as tenure is also what allows faculty to have protections while they research, faculty are often teaching, researching, and developing projects as they work steadily in their fields, removing tenure will prevent innovation in the field as it removes the safety of the freedom to take risks on experiments which may or may not succeed. Some failure is expected, but researchers may not take the risk necessary to achieve new levels without tenure.

Academic freedom: The bill would limit what faculty can teach and study, and would create mechanisms to penalize educators who go against the bill's views. In many ways this is just un-American, and prevents free speech and academic freedom.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI): The bill would ban DEI programs and courses. We do need the ability to research and participate in supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, these programs bring in diverse thinking and promote new thinking and risk taking. We need alternate perspectives to help growth, without the support of these programs our learning environments will be too homogenous.

Collective bargaining: The bill would limit what can be collectively bargained in a contract. This is inappropriate, most faculty and staff at universities are already underpaid and over worked.

Retrenchment: The bill would give administrators the power to shut down programs and lay off faculty.

Surveillance: The bill would create mechanisms to penalize and fire educators who go against the bill's views. This is creating a surveillance state and is un-American. Educators already are over taxed, they don't need to be looking over their shoulder constantly and worry as they are also working to educate students and do their research.

Vague language: The bill is so vague that it could be used to target topics and research that opponents don't like.

Hostile environment: The bill could create hostile environments for people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized communities, this includes first generation students, women, and low-income students. It limits their opportunities and access.

Difficulty recruiting faculty: The bill could make it harder to recruit faculty. We want to be considered one of the best states, and passing this bill will mean that we are likely to lose our best and brightest to other institutions in other states.

Opening universities up to lawsuits: The bill could open universities up to lawsuits.

All of this is to say, this is a terrible bill for Ohioans and should not be passed.