

Testimony of Erynn Beaton, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11, 2025

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

My name is Erynn Beaton, and I am a professor of public affairs at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for over 7 years. I do not represent The Ohio State University today but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Like my colleagues, I have worked very hard to become a tenured scholar. Of course, I had 13 years of primary and secondary school (including Kindergarten). I spent 4 years earning a bachelor's degree, 3 years on a master's degree, and 4 years after that on a doctoral degree. After another 6 years, based on the merit of my research, teaching, and service, my academic peers voted to grant me tenure. In all, that's more than 30 years of schooling. So, when I say that I am entitled to academic freedom, what I really mean is that I have earned it.

SB1 would violate the academic freedom that I have earned. The bill says "shall not" 41 different times and "prohibits" 14 times. It only references freedom once, and that's in the context of limiting my academic freedom by restricting it to what the state finds "allowable" (line 1001). The bill's overly broad treatment of retrenchment (lines 1023-1029) and review process allowing faculty to be terminated without due process (line 1014) are further assaults on academic freedom.

With my academic freedom, I have chosen to study gender inequalities, specifically sexual harassment. Despite it being a taboo subject, I study sexual harassment because, in my professional and academic career, I've had to endure it countless times – unfair and unnecessary impediments. With this course of research, I've had the honor and burden of supporting too many female students who have been sexually assaulted and students of color who have had to endure racial slurs on campus. Unfortunately, sexism and racism remain commonplace, and SB1, under the guise of anti-DEI, will eliminate programs (lines 614-643) meant to protect students from these injustices.

I implore this committee to see SB1 for what it is: an affront to academic freedom and a wedge that will divide and alienate communities on campus.

Sincerely,
Erynn Beaton