

Testimony of Felicia Zamora, Associate Professor
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 8, 2025

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

My name is Felicia Zamora, and I am an associate professor of English at University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for just under five years. I do not represent University of Cincinnati but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am in deep opposition of Senate Bill 1 (SB1). I see SB1 as the most abhorred piece of legislation I've seen in my 24 years of working in higher education.

SB1 would set the higher education system in Ohio back 75 years or more. With the proposed "retrenchment" and "post tenure" review policies, Ohio universities and colleges would be unable to hire national and global talent as faculty, due to these policies destroying the prestige and honor gaining tenure means on a national scale. Ohio universities and colleges would be left having to hire mediocre and less qualified faculty due to these policies. The reputations of Ohio universities and colleges would be annihilated. Currently, I work in a program that is one of the top Ph.D. programs of its discipline in the country. Ohio universities and colleges have many departments/areas like this. If word gets out about SB1 passing, Ohio universities and colleges will lose hires and current faculty. Not to mention being unable to recruit the top students for the graduate and professional programs in the country (medical school and law school). Without faculty support, protections, prohibitions on collective bargaining, and faculty strike ban, this puts a red flag on Ohio schools as being poorly knowledgeable of what higher education needs in the 21st Century. Ohio would be the laughingstock of higher education in the United States and the world.

I've dedicated my life to higher education, to access for students, for opportunities, to encourage minds to think beyond the self and into community, to push learners to question and not follow easily, to open proverbial doors for all people, and to guide knowledge and learning that expands and challenges students' thinking. I've worked in Iowa, Colorado, and Arizona before Ohio, and I am appalled by this bill. SB1 will limit the academic freedom that has fueled the soul of this state and nation. With the passing of this bill, Ohio universities and colleges would no longer be a place that aligns with the necessary innovation, community building, freedom of expression, exceptional learning, support of artistic scholarship, and integrity that faculty need and desire. This bill jeopardizes the livelihood and career of every faculty member in Ohio, not to mention the faculty whose nationally and globally recognized research intersects with topics this bill labels to villainize as "contentious." Without being able to teach on globally urgent topics (such as environmental degradation, environmental law, labor relations, narrative medicine, anti-blackness, global sustainability, queer theory, art as social justice, women and gender studies, and the list goes on), Ohio universities and colleges will lose top graduate students and post-doctoral students from around the country and globe. Ohio will not be able to contend with some of the top research topics in the world.

Retrenchment, post-tenure reviews, denying faculty the right to strike and protest, and the unethical profiling process of putting faculty syllabi and "qualifications" on a state website, undermines the entire academic integrity that Ohio universities and colleges have built over decades and decades. This act over-steps into a governance not unlike the civilizations that quickly led to groupthink, forcible control from governance, authoritarianism, and frightening acts of power including repealing the freedoms of education and thought.

One need only look to Germany in the early 20th Century to see how slippery these methods of control become. If Ohio abolishes trust in higher education, then this undermines the achievements and the impactful careers of working-aged citizens who were educated under these systems. These systems—the same systems that taught the current elected Ohio politicians and legislators—also educated current Ohio university and college professors who now teach current students who are being trained to contribute to a global world and become even more engaged citizens. States don't ask faculty to do the jobs of senators or politicians. Why would Ohio have politicians make decisions on higher education? Isn't this like asking a mechanic to conduct brain surgery, or an atomic scientist to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? If states undermine the expertise of those in higher education, this is undermining the entire social, political, structural, and economic systems in Ohio and beyond. Ohio is only as strong as its people and its support of its people. SB1 is an attack on higher education, which is attacking every educated person in this state.

Words are being weaponized right now. A narrative designed to villainize Ohio higher education and free-thought—the very backbone of democracy.

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee, you live in Ohio, you work *for* Ohio and this means you—and your beloveds—have been educated (or are being educated) by a university or college in Ohio and SB1 is an attack on you—an attack on your qualifications, your history, your education, and your family's education. Step up and fight with the citizens of Ohio. Work *for* Ohioans now. Step up and vote against this horrific, unethical, and demonizing bill.