

Testimony of Suzanne Reyes, Assistant Professor of English

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee

Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair

February 7, 2025

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

My name is Suzanne Reyes--Assistant Professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for almost 16 years. This is my own testimony drawn from my professional college teaching experience of over 30 years. I do not represent Cuyahoga Community College, but, rather, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am writing to persuade you that SB1 will damage the ability of Ohio's universities, colleges, and community colleges to build the best learning environments for their students.

My main concern with SB1 is the damage I believe it will cause to the collaborative, engaged nature of the college community. I see two major ways that this damage will manifest itself. An important dynamic at a community college exists between administration and faculty members who must regularly collaborate to create an environment for students that leads to success. The way that is typically done at most colleges, including community colleges, is by engaging faculty and administration (and sometimes staff and students) in committee work to solve problems at the college or to improve processes, procedures, curriculum, etc., that is already in place. These committees depend on all stakeholders having a voice and feeling open to share experiences, opinions, and expertise. SB1 appears to stifle faculty voices since many of the provisions would eliminate protections that currently provide faculty confidence in sharing openly with administrators. This will have a detrimental impact on students since typically, faculty members interact most closely with students and can often bring that perspective to the table while administration can bring the big picture viewpoint. Both perspectives are essential to finding creative, practical solutions to problems and approaches. However, SB1 will cause a major imbalance to occur with administrative voices (and even outside political voices) becoming predominant.

I would like to share one major example from Cuyahoga Community College of this collaborative relationship between faculty and administration that could never have taken place without the CCC-AAUP's bargaining agreement or without faculty having the full protection of tenure. The Distance Learning Steering Committee (created through the CCC-AAUP contract) comprised of seven administrative members and seven tenured faculty enlisted 24 faculty volunteers to train and test different LMS options to replace the LMS we had used for 25 years. The decision to adopt the current

LMS that replaced our old one was made through a rigorous process of testing, feedback, discussion, and voting through the committee. Open dialogue and debate were necessary to reach a conclusion that satisfied the needs of all stakeholders at the college. Most importantly, it led to a decision that will set up students well for success. This shared-governance process has also led to Tri-C winning a national award for its 18-month long LMS Review process. This March, Tri-C will be accepting the award “2024 Award for Excellence in eLearning” from the Instructional Technology Council. Without the voice of faculty who teach students using the LMS platform, this could not have happened. I fear that under SB1, faculty would not share concerns and opinions openly in situations such as this one, leading to choices being made from a limited perspective.

Lastly and most importantly, open discussion and debate is also a core value of the classroom. Students must learn to use critical thinking skills and feel comfortable expressing themselves and even debating in an academic manner with those who disagree with them. SB1 stifles openness in the classroom and causes a divisive atmosphere between students and faculty members. It may cause students to feel wary of instructors through the leading questions it insists must be standard on evaluations. SB1 may also cause undue anxiety for instructors who will constantly need to wonder if they are violating the vague and concerning “intellectual diversity” language as well as the confusing concept of “controversial issues” being regulated in the classroom. Many disciplines teach courses where controversial issues are at the center of the required outcomes. For example, I teach College Composition I and II. In both classes, teaching argument is required by the official course outcomes. A core principle of argumentation is that students must select a controversial, debatable issue as a topic for writing. It is essential that students and faculty walk into a class like this every day believing that each member of the classroom is there to discuss and debate in good faith, feeling confident that every voice will be heard and that it is alright to have differences of opinion as long as respect is shown to all voices. Unfortunately, the language of SB1 makes it clear that this openness and willingness to respect all voices will be lost.

I will end by saying that my experiences working with students in the classroom are no different from my experiences working in collaboration with the administration of the college. We must all respect one another as people who believe in critical thinking, discussion, debate, and collaboration. None of these principles seem to be valued in the language of SB1. Instead, it feels as if we will see a drastic change to the environment of higher education, even at the community college.