

**Testimony Before the Ohio Senate
Higher Education Committee
February 11, 2025**

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

My name is Christy Backley. I strongly oppose SB 1—the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act—and its companion bill HB 6 because it would curtail academic freedom at state institutions of higher learning, harm students as well as faculty by ending DEI programs and limiting freedom of speech, and ultimately hamper the state’s prosperity.

I deplore the ban on DEI programs, training, and scholarships. The ban on all things related to DEI could leave racial and other discrimination unchecked. It would ban training and programs that help ensure all students, no matter their backgrounds or disability, can succeed.

I oppose the bill as a threat to academic freedom, effective collective bargaining, and tenure.

Academic freedom: The bill would undermine academic freedom, a fundamental value in American higher education that allows faculty members to pursue their academic interests without fear of reprisal and protects them from dismissal for political reasons.

I do not oppose robust classroom discussion and diversity of views, but I worry that discussion about such issues as climate change (giving credence, for example, to the view it is a hoax) would do the students a major disservice. It could discourage teachers from correcting students who deny factual historical events like the Holocaust ever took place.

Collective bargaining: To prohibit faculty from striking for better salaries and conditions of work would eliminate a rarely used tool for faculty to achieve fairness. Faculty would be unable to negotiate about workload, tenure, evaluations, and proposed retrenchment, which is unfair.

Tenure protections: I object to annual post-tenure reviews (including compliance with workload policy) because they defeat the purpose of tenure of faculty who have already proven themselves.

I oppose the bill as potentially damaging to state and local economies.

This bill will undoubtedly cause highly qualified faculty and students to leave Ohio for institutions in other states that honor academic freedom. This “brain drain” could result in state colleges and universities having weaker academics and reduced reputations--potentially damaging local and state economies, as investment typically follows a well-educated and trained workforce.

Please consider these comments and vote NO on this destructive bill.