

Testimony of Megan Faragher
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
7 February 2025

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

My name is Megan Faragher, and I am a professor of English at Wright State University where I have taught for over ten years. I do not represent Wright State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Even with over 500 testimonials in evidence from the last iteration of this bill, representing droves more who oppose it, it is important to add relevant recent data supporting what those in higher education tried to state last time: *bills like these are damaging to the states where they are adopted. They add significantly to the censorship on campuses; they dissuade students from coming to colleges where they are enacted; they alienate talented faculty.* These are the facts we now know about bills like these.

We now are surer than we were last year that a decimation of higher education on this scale will have inevitable negative ramifications for the state. If, as Vice Chair suggests, this bill is designed to free speech on campus, we now know what the bill does in effect: censor faculty and harm student opinions of the state's education system. The adoption of the bill can only be understood as an embrace of these outcomes. For that reason, I request you reject the bill.

At a time when all Ohio colleges understand the threat of the enrollment cliff, Florida has demonstrated that these policies will only succeed in driving students out of the state; *almost 13% of Florida seniors said they won't even consider college in Florida because of policies like SB 1.* We cannot afford that. Those are students who will never return to start businesses to raise families after they leave. And while a few students may complain about a few faculty today, *in Florida now, 78% of students going to college are concerned that they will have a sub-standard education; that's* overwhelming consensus.¹ When I see the number of students outraged about this bill, I know the same results will follow here. And, as we also now know, faculty will not tolerate reduced labor protections and increasingly censorial environments when they just want to do their jobs. The 2023 AAUP report on Florida determined that the new laws in Florida (like SB 1) were being widely understood as "politically and ideologically driven assault" on higher education by faculty across the board.² It goes without saying that this bill guts labor protections and is a clear assault on unions across the state, who have all stood strongly, repeatedly, and firmly against the bill. It is

¹ <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/desantis-florida-education>

² <https://www.aaup.org/report/report-special-committee-political-interference-and-academic-freedom-florida%E2%80%99s-public-higher?>

upsetting that legislators who are meant to improve the wealth and prosperity of the region would try so hard to put Ohio's prosperity in harm's way like this - again. Do they just not want colleges in Ohio, one must ask?

In the past session, Ohio's representatives did the right thing by rejecting this bill. And now, you have the chance to do so again. I encourage you to do so; reject this bill. But also remember that every year that this bill is threatened is yet another year where faculty cannot recommend Ohio with deep enthusiasm to their talented colleagues and friends, who value their opinions about the higher education working environment.

To close, I note that as a scholar who has studied George Orwell's work much of my decades-long career, I find it sad to be writing this letter; Orwell's life's work was stridently opposed to censoring even the most uncomfortable topics; "If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." The truth that some don't want to hear is that this bill will cause irreparable harm to higher education. But these are the facts. So, reject this bill. Give students liberty to speak as they wish and learn what they want. That is the model that has made American universities a beacon of the world. You have the opportunity to reject this bill and protect those values. Please do so.

With deep sincerity,

Dr. Megan Faragher