

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Higher Education Committee
February 9th, 2025

Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Erin Susick, and I am opposed to Senate Bill 1 as an Ohioan, parent of two children, and mathematics faculty member at an Ohio community college. I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it represents an interference into higher education that threatens academic freedom, shared governance, and the ability of institutions to teach students effectively. In this testimony I am speaking for myself and not my employer.

I have lived and worked in Ohio for almost 15 years, and I love this state. However, my husband and I grew up in Pennsylvania and attended college at two excellent schools – the University of Pittsburgh and Penn State University. We earned a wonderful and rigorous education, but up until the introduction of Senate Bill 83 and Senate Bill 1, we would not have considered having our children attend those schools when compared to the opportunities available in Ohio. For example, even the current in-state tuition in Pennsylvania schools is much higher than in Ohio (approx. \$850/credit at the University of Pittsburgh vs approx. \$500/credit at Ohio State). Ohio has done a wonderful job of keeping tuition low for students. Ohio also does an excellent job with curriculum and transferability in comparison to Pennsylvania. Many of my friends and relatives in Pennsylvania were required to retake general education courses when they transferred schools, wasting time and money. In Ohio, our general education requirements are transferrable across all public institutions because of the Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36). I am a member of the mathematics panel, and we collaborate to create course learning outcomes and review courses for approval from colleges across the state. However, the passage of Senate Bill 1 would negate these and other assets of Ohio colleges, and I would not encourage my children to stay in state for their education.

At my community college, we already have a strong commitment to intellectual diversity. Our students come from various backgrounds and encompass a wide range of ages, which makes for an amazing classroom environment. When I teach statistics, I love to use examples from a student's major, current events, politics, sports, and music to help students understand data analysis concepts and think critically. For example, political polling is a great way to explain confidence intervals and margin of error. In the 2024 Presidential election, one poll predicted that President Trump was expected to get approximately 47% of the votes with a margin of error of 3%. What does that mean? What actually happened in the election? We can also discuss how political polling is conducted and talk about the benefits and issues involved. This can bring up a lot of different thoughts and opinions, but we are able to have a discussion with room for disagreement, while explicitly stating the current best practices in the field of statistics. I am not teaching students *what* to think when they analyze data but rather teaching them to *understand* a variety of tools and methods that they can choose to use when analyzing data.

In talking with my colleagues about their classes and even visiting them as a guest, I have seen a similar commitment to intellectual diversity. They are intensely passionate about teaching, their subject matter and helping our students learn. This would be compromised with the passage of Senate Bill 1, as it encourages students and colleagues to file complaints against anyone at the college that allegedly interferes with intellectual diversity rights. All views would be subject to complaint, conservative and liberal alike, and it would have a chilling effect on the classroom environment.

Though Senator Cirino claims to support diverse student viewpoints by sponsoring this bill, his comments about students protesting Senate Bill 1 show the opposite. He stated, "The students

that were out here protesting are probably getting extra credit for being here. I don't believe that they have studied the bill and all the implications of this legislation and the impact on higher education in Ohio. I believe that they were asked to be here by their professors." (Henry, 2025, para. 25) His comment shows a fundamental lack of understanding of what goes on in our classrooms. Again, our job as educators is not to teach students what to think or to provide them with extra credit opportunities. We want them to complete the regular credit assignments and learn the required material for the course. Senator Cirino's comments also demonstrate a lack of respect for students' dissenting opinions as well as a disregard of a students' ability to research a topic, think critically, and come to their own conclusions.

Senate Bill 1 seeks to legislate policies that are already in place at colleges using shared governance and/or a collective bargaining agreement, such as faculty evaluations, workload, academic freedom, tenure, conditions for striking, and retrenchment. College administration and faculty are best suited to develop these policies together *collaboratively* as they are the ones who understand student and program needs as well as the mission and strategic plan for the school. Legislating the requirements for these topics through Senate Bill 1 will put Ohio colleges at a disadvantage in retaining and recruiting talented faculty as some of them will choose to live and work in states without such egregious government overreach. In addition, it is exactly these types of bills that push my colleagues, even conservatives, further left in their ideology. Opposing Senate Bill 83 and 1 has fostered a tremendous amount solidarity throughout our faculty union that echoes the backlash from Senate Bill 5.

My college has been frequently recognized as one of the country's top workplaces in higher education by Great Colleges to Work For and has won multiple NorthCoast99 awards. We also have strong support in the community with our most recent levy passing with 61% of voters' support. This reflects the institution's strong culture of student success, shared governance, and academic freedom. We attract the some of the best faculty in the country, and that is why we are able to help our students learn and be successful in their fields. The passage of Senate Bill 1 would severely impact our ability to continue this important work. I urge you to oppose this bill for the sake of our students, our institutions, and the future of Ohio.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Henry, Megan. "Ohio GOP lawmaker again proposes to overhaul higher ed, ban diversity efforts and labor strikes." *Ohio Capital Journal*, January 23, 2025, <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/01/23/ohio-gop-lawmaker-again-proposes-to-overhaul-higher-ed-ban-diversity-efforts-and-labor-strikes/>