

Meli Taylor
Testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 1

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee:

My name is Meli Taylor, and I am a librarian and qualified rank faculty member at Bowling Green State University. My views do not represent the views of my employer, but I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 1.

I am strongly opposed to this bill and the chilling result it will have on faculty retention in the state of Ohio. According to a survey conducted by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) of more than 4,200 faculty members in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas in 2023, “two-thirds of respondents said they wouldn’t recommend academic work in their state to colleagues,” while “about a third said they were actively considering employment in another state” (Zahneis & Williams June, 2023). Institutions in these states have also had a more difficult time recruiting faculty, with almost 50% of respondents reporting a decrease in the number of applications for faculty positions, alongside a decrease in application quality. (Zahneis & Williams June, 2023). Respondents cited salary concerns and legislation restricting academic freedom, tenure, and DEI work as top reasons for seeking work outside of the state.

Ohio has thus far been unique among “red states” in its commitment to education and intellectual freedom. However, Senate Bill 1 would place Ohio in the same category as Texas and Florida, where legislative overreach has decimated the ability of higher education to remain independent of political pressure and instead focus on supporting students and faculty research. Passing Senate Bill 1 would likely lead to the same “brain drain” that has been reported in Florida, Texas, and elsewhere, and greatly weaken our state’s ability to provide quality higher education for our students and workforce.

On a personal note, I am a recent returning resident to the state of Ohio; I attended Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio from 2013-2017 and moved back to the state for my first library faculty position in August 2024. Despite Kenyon’s reputation as a “liberal school,” my professors expressed a wide range of political and ideological viewpoints and cultivated a respectful and inclusive environment that allowed us to learn and grow while respecting our deep-seated beliefs. Yes, I read The Communist Manifesto during university, but I also read Adam Smith, Nietzsche, and the Bible. All of these texts were discussed and critiqued on their own merit, not assigned as part of an attempt to “brainwash” students. I never felt that my religious and political beliefs were attacked, only challenged in ways that helped me develop my research skills and ability to argue in speech and writing.

After graduation, I never expected to move back to Ohio, but after a challenging job search, I was fortunate to be offered a librarian position at Bowling Green State University, an institution dedicated to student well-being and the betterment of Ohio civil society. I would not have accepted this job - or any job in Ohio - if a law similar to the one proposed in Senate Bill 1 had already been passed; I avoided all jobs during my search that would have forced me to relocate to Florida or Texas. My faculty status at Bowling Green State University does not grant me a hefty paycheck, but it does afford me strong labor rights through my inclusion in a faculty labor union as well as the right to freedom of thought and speech through the university's commitment to intellectual freedom. Senate Bill 1 would destroy this freedom by giving the Ohio legislature unprecedented power over higher education institutions' ability to determine their own curricular requirements, tenure and retrenchment policies, and student services. It would also erode the power of faculty labor unions to negotiate with university administration and guarantee rights for workers. This bill is a costly example of legislative overreach in higher education, and will undermine the ability of Ohio universities to hire and retain faculty, leading to a degradation in the quality of education for our students and, ultimately, a less educated and skilled Ohio workforce.

Please, vote no on Senate Bill 1 and reject these politically-motivated attacks on labor and education in our great state. Thank you.