

Testimony of Dr. Gretchen McNamara
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 9, 2025

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

My name is Gretchen McNamara and I am a professor of Music at Wright State University where I have taught for eighteen years. I do not represent Wright State but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

After two years of failed attempts to pass Senate Bill 83, I'm appalled at the current Ohio Legislator's priority in the new year to gut higher education with attacks on labor protections, shared governance, tenure, and diversity, equity and inclusion by fast tracking Senate Bill 1. It should come as no surprise that just because the makeup of our elected officials has changed, that Ohio's constituents have not. Eroding and controlling higher education has not been, nor is it now, the priority of the citizens of Ohio. We want affordable higher education options for our families. We want opportunities to learn in environments that are diverse and a safe place to question. We want faculty who are committed to reflecting on the past and seeking both the truths of our history and the realities of our present. We want universities to have the resources to support research and innovation, creativity and expression. We want faculty, students, and staff to feel safe, heard, understood, and valued. Senate Bill 1, through its proposed changes to the learning environment of our students and the working environment of faculty will destroy higher education and harm workers, families, and communities in Ohio.

The Bill is wrought with contradictions using language like 'intellectual diversity' to describe an environment that would limit diversity of thought, not expand it. It puts decision making power in the hands of public officials by suppressing academic freedom, silencing voices, and controlling that which is the responsibility of the academic body, its curriculum. It would destroy the known values of higher education including our reputation for research and teaching without government influence and the system's most profound framework, shared governance. And it would erode the rights of workers to negotiate their working conditions which are the learning conditions of students across the state.

It is also problematic that requiring specific administrative oversight and compliance report writing to implement some of the changes required of the bill will exacerbate an already inverted financial commitment to administrative bloat over the academic mission of the university. SB1 also attempts to create a one-size-fits all structure to workload and faculty evaluations that cannot possibly be accomplished due to the complex teaching, learning, and scholarly environments of our universities.

As a higher education worker, I vehemently oppose Senate Bill 1 and as a citizen of Ohio, I'm asking you to oppose it. Do not be on the wrong side of history and destroy higher education as we know it. It will hurt everyone involved, students, faculty, staff, the community we serve and the State of Ohio.

Dr. Gretchen McNamara