

# OPPONENT TESTIMONY SENATE BILL 1

Ohio Senate Committee on Higher Education

Brad M. Maguth, PhD, February 11, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingraham, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee. My name is Brad Maguth, and I am a tenured professor at The University of Akron. Let me open by saying my testimony solely represents my views and not that of my employer.

I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it represents an unprecedented overreach into higher education, it undermines academic freedom, faculty governance, and the ability of institutions to prepare students for an increasingly multicultural and global world.

As a child born and raised on Cleveland's near west side, I owe a great deal of my success to the talented and caring K12 and higher education faculty that believed in and supported my journey. In particular, in college, I had faculty that made class engaging by integrating controversial and contested content, helping students reach beyond their enculturation to explore new ideas and perspectives, and pushing us to do the difficult yet rewarding work associated with this nation's highest Office, that of Citizen in a multicultural, democratic Republic.

Now, as a Professor, I have the privilege to return this favor to my students. Currently, I reside as a leading figure in my field, having won several state, national, and international distinctions for my teaching and research. It is an honor to pay it forward as I stand on the shoulders of those Ohio educators before me, as I work to open up doors of opportunity to my current undergraduate and graduate students. The teachers who helped mold my future did not act alone. They had local and state neighbors and elected officials who championed and invested in their growth and success. After all, there is no greater gift to Ohio's children than providing them access to a world-class educator and education system; one with the most prepared and talented teachers (Chetty, 2014; Darling Hammond 2000).

Let me communicate to this important assembly, especially, to all those who believe in the power of education to expand one's horizons and opportunities, if passed, Senate Bill 1 will harm our beloved Universities, its students, and facilities in profound ways. With over 15 years of direct faculty experience working with college students, I can assure you never have I or my colleagues attempted to proselytize or indoctrinate students. The work we do to advance a meaningful liberal arts education is to expand one's mind through research, intercultural dialogue, and seeking informed solutions to the problems we as people face. While there are several elements of this bill that on their own would make reasonable faculty shutter and voice their opposition, I take the most offense to the proposed policies on post-tenure review and collective bargaining. Tenure helps safeguard academic freedom, allowing scholars to research, teach, and express ideas without fear of political or economic retribution. This ensures that universities endure as spaces for critical inquiry, innovation, and dialogue—key components of a thriving democracy. When professors can freely investigate and discuss issues such as human rights, government policies, or historical injustices, they contribute to an informed citizenry that help hold those in power accountable.

Throughout history, faculty and their families have been imprisoned, censored, and even murdered and tortured for efforts to uphold the most basic of human rights in challenging oppressive regimes. This summer I will again lead a group of 20 Ohio educators to Germany and Poland in an expedition to learn high-leverage practices in teaching the Holocaust and genocide. Let us not forget a Nazi German regime that expelled,

imprisoned, and executed academics who opposed their political ideology (Evans, 2003). Notably, Albert Einstein who fled Germany due to persecution, and the many Jewish scholars that were dismissed from universities. I also think of the Soviet Union's persecution of intellectuals who questioned Marxist ideology or Soviet policies, such as Nikolai Vavilov, who was imprisoned and murdered under Stalin's purges (Chamberlin, 1929). As a researcher in the People's Republic of China in the early 2000s, I remember learning of the intellectuals who were publically humiliated and beaten to death as Mao Zedong's regime sought to eliminate during the Cultural Revolution (Su, 2020).

Let us not also forget our history under McCarthyism in the United States. During the Red Scare, professors were fired or blacklisted for alleged communist sympathies, including academics like Owen Lattimore (Gale.com, 2025). Tenure played a crucial role in protecting some faculty from these political purges. There are other examples we could discuss, including the recent imprisonment of academic political dissidents from universities under Turkish President Erdogan. I also remember the distressed messages from a colleague in Iran living in fear of imprisonment and execution for her underground work fighting for women's rights and democracy.

History demonstrate how authoritarian regimes often target academics because they promote critical thought and challenge propaganda. Tenure acts as a buffer against such state political pressures, making it a fundamental safeguard for democracy. This eagerness to protect and enshrine the freedom of speech to preserve democracy is aligned with the Framers' eagerness in the U.S. Bill of Rights to center the freedom of speech, assembly, petition, and press in the U.S. Constitution. Instead of weakening the institution of tenure and free speech, one would think this assembly would protect and safeguard intellectual diversity to best align with other provisions of this bill.

As a lifelong Buckeye who has taught, advised, and cared for thousands of university students in our beloved higher education system, I ask that you listen to the overwhelming opposition testimony submitted by faculty that report the harm this Bill will cause if passed. As evident in states like Florida that have passed similar destructive bills, these restrictions hurt efforts to recruit and retain the world-class faculty our university students need and deserve (Topalidis & Austin, 2023). Other lessons from Florida's rollout include the large state expenditures and increased governance associated with monitoring these provisions, these system-wide reviews, and the large unexpected costs associated with lawsuits and legal fees (Saunders, 2024; Hodgson). Key findings in a recent UFF study indicate more than 65% of responding faculty have not recommended their state as a desirable place to work for colleagues, and just over 30% of faculty actively interviewing for other positions (Hodgson & Kumar, 2023)

Supporting and championing the difficult and often underappreciated work faculty undertake has never been more important. As a proud Buckeye that is honored and humbled to be able to work with our remarkable higher education students, I ask that you vote to preserve Ohio's world-class higher education system by protecting academic freedom and voting against Senate Bill 1.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brad Maguth

Professor & Ohio Resident

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