

Senate Bill 1

Rachel Pritchard, Ph.D.

Opponent Testimony

Senate Higher Education Committee

February 7, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Rachel Pritchard. I am an Assistant Professor of Biology at Central Ohio Technical College and have a total of 11 years of teaching experience in higher education. I do not represent Central Ohio Technical College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I strongly oppose SB 1.

As a college professor who loves her profession and cares deeply for her students, colleagues, and institution, I oppose this bill for a variety of reasons as outlined below.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): From my experience as a college educator at multiple institutions, I have only seen positive impacts to the campus community as a result of DEI programming or initiatives. I have personally benefitted as an instructor by learning about different cultural backgrounds and experiences, which has allowed me to better understand the life situations and issues faced by the diverse students I teach. Removing all orientation and training related to DEI, as well as eliminating all DEI offices, from Ohio's colleges and universities will prevent these sorts of learning opportunities, which will make our professors less equipped to understand their students.

Annual faculty evaluations: This bill requires institutions to provide annual evaluations for all full-time faculty members. Many faculty members, including myself, have benefitted from multi-year contracts. At my current institution, I have had to go through multiple successful annual evaluations to earn a multi-year contract, which has saved me and my administrators time in yearly classroom observations, meetings, and report generation during my non-review year. My multi-year contract was earned through past positive performance, and returning to an annual evaluation system for all faculty members feels like a punishment and a lack of trust in the abilities of our state's educators. The implementation of annual evaluations will require additional yearly work from all professors, which must put together annual reviews with substantial evidence of professional activities, classroom observations, and notes from administrators. The work will be exponentially increased for administrators, who will now have to perform these evaluations for every faculty member on campus every year. The time spent on annual evaluations for faculty members, many of which had previously earned multi-year contracts through positive past reviews, will take away from their abilities to pursue other tasks, such as developing or improving academic programs.

A significant portion of these reviews will be based on student evaluations under the requirements of SB 1. There is great value in student feedback. I always encourage my students to complete course evaluations and use their feedback to improve my teaching for future classes. Despite my encouragement, it is still often only a handful of students who complete these evaluations. Most often, it is those students with very positive or very negative experiences that are most likely to fill out course evaluations. Making this limited amount of student feedback a significant portion of annual faculty evaluations doesn't give a full picture of their classroom expertise or experience.

The implementation of not just student evaluations but peer evaluations will also be a change to evaluation procedures. This peer evaluation system will have to be constructed and implemented, which will again require significant administrator time. Completing these reviews will also increase the workload of each faculty member at the institution. If the expectation is that all faculty members would complete peer evaluations for all other faculty, that could create scenarios where we are forced to evaluate individuals we may not know well or may have limited knowledge of their teaching style and activities. This could also have the potential to not fully capture the abilities and performance of faculty members.

Collective bargaining: As a member of the United Faculty/Central Ohio Technical College, I have greatly benefitted from the past and current ability of our collective bargaining unit to fight for faculty working conditions. If SB 1 is approved, our collective bargaining unit will lose the ability to bargain for faculty workload or evaluation procedures. With no ability to bargain for workload, institutions can implement any level of credit or contact hours required for faculty to teach each term that they please. The inability to fight for fair working conditions for faculty members could result in not only a substantial increase to workload for current faculty members but may cause other highly qualified, effective educators to leave or avoid jobs in Ohio in favor of other states where they have a greater voice in their working conditions.

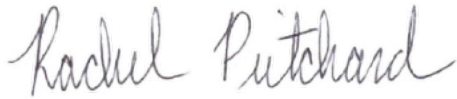
Elimination of specified undergraduate degree programs: SB 1 will require institutions to get rid of all academic programs that have less than 5 graduates over any 3-year period. There could be a number of reasons why programs have low numbers of graduates, ranging from program restructuring and rebuilding to changes in industry standards and jobs. Additionally, there are many programs that, while they may not individually graduate many students, serve as important supports for other programs and majors that do have significant numbers of graduates. Removing these programs will not only have impacts on students in those programs but also other programs that rely on cross-program classes and collaboration. There should be more flexibility when looking at these programs, and each institution should have the ability to look at that program and their bigger role in the institution to make a decision about its future.

American civic literacy course requirement: SB 1 also requires that all institutions develop and include a 3-credit hour American civic literacy course as part of their curriculum. While this will change the academic experience of all Ohio higher education students, it will have the biggest impact on students at 2-year institutions. There are strict guidelines on the number of credit hours students can take to earn an associate degree, and programs of study for students at 2-year institutions have been specially created to pack in the maximum amount of course material in this limited number of credit hours. If a new civics course must be implemented for all students at 2-year institutions, this will come at the cost of removing a different course from their plan of study.

From my own experience, I have seen programs have to make hard choices about classes taken by students and remove content that is directly relevant to their professional career. By adding this required course, all programs will have to cut an existing class from their plans of study. This could cost students valuable time learning about subjects directly applicable to their professional career and would decrease the career-readiness of these students upon graduation.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I strongly encourage you to think about the incredible educators across the state of Ohio who care deeply about their students and their profession as you consider SB 1. Because of the negative impact this bill will have on faculty and student experiences at Ohio institutions, I strongly urge you to oppose SB 1.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Pritchard". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large 'R' and a long, sweeping 'P'.

Rachel Pritchard