

Testimony of Lauren Kinsman-Costello, Ph.D.

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11, 2025

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

My name is Lauren Kinsman-Costello, and I am a professor of Biological Sciences at Kent State University, where I have worked for over 10 years. I do not represent Kent State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

SB1 will severely erode Ohio's universities, to the detriment of students and all Ohioans. Universities support their local and regional communities economically, provide many public services, and cultivate well-educated professionals and citizens.

I know that, as politicians, I don't need to tell you how complicated the challenges we face are. You constantly weigh the pros and cons of many different kinds of decisions, striving for realistic solutions, in what feels like game where there will always be winners and losers. But a rising tide can lift all boats. With creativity and the best available knowledge, there are solutions that can improve the well-being of all Ohioans. And, Ohio citizens armed with technical proficiency, problem-solving skills, and diverse perspectives are necessary to find creative solutions that help us all thrive. A college degree is not necessary for success. But for many, it is the best path to financial health and personal fulfillment.

SB1 will have far-reaching effects on every aspect of Ohio's publicly funded university systems. **I urge you to see this bill for what it really is: an attempt to leverage the unjustified fears of some to undermine a robust publicly funded university system that benefits all.** Ohio's public universities are one of its strongest assets. If passed, SB1 will severely diminish our state's ability to educate, serve, and economically support its citizens. Each of you was elected to support and serve your constituents, and I trust you will consider how the well-being of us all will be negatively impacted by this bill.

This testimony focuses on specific aspects of SB1: sections on "Diversity, equity, and inclusion, intellectual diversity, and other concepts" and the overall administrative burden placed on universities. Although not described, I also disagree with SB1's attempts to eliminate faculty collective bargaining rights and other components of the bill.

Administrative Burdens

SB1 places multiple untenable administrative burdens on universities. Ohio universities are already doing the difficult work of restructuring and contracting to adapt as funding continues to decline, budget after budget. The population of college age citizens is declining, and individuals are choosing from a wider range of career paths, many of which do not require

college degrees. These transitions are painful to some, particularly those seeing universities they have worked for and attended cut major programs. But universities remain committed to their missions and maintaining bottom line viability. In other words, university administrators, faculty, and staff are already doing more with less. The administrative requirements associated with SB1 come with no additional funding support, meaning that most universities will struggle to both comply with the bill's requirements and continue to achieve their fundamental missions. In the end, tuition-paying students will suffer and receive less educational and career opportunities.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion, intellectual diversity, and other concepts

Research shows that more diverse groups are more productive and achieve better results. Prohibiting activities that promote diverse university staff and students, ensure equity, and create an environment that is inclusive of all needs and identities helps no one and ultimately hurts everyone, although some much more than others. Proactive efforts are necessary to remove the barriers that intentionally and unintentionally have excluded individuals of certain groups for generations. Without actively removing these barriers, universities will not fully be able to excel in the pursuit of knowledge and ensure full intellectual diversity. I grew up saying the pledge of allegiance in all my classrooms, every day. These programs help our society live up to the aspiration of "...with liberty and justice for all."

Thank you for your time and attention.