

Testimony of John T. Plecnik, J.D., LL.M.

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee

Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair

February 10, 2025

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

My name is John Plecnik, and I am an associate professor of law at Cleveland State University, where I have taught for 12 years. I do not represent Cleveland State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

You might recall from May and November of 2023, when I last visited you at the Statehouse, I am known as the most conservative professor in Ohio. I am also known as Commissioner “NO” in Lake County, where my “NO” vote killed the biggest tax increase in our community’s history. In the past, I have proudly served as Republican State Central Committeeman for Ohio Senate District 18 and I currently serve as Lake County Commissioner.

Much of what I have to share is repetition of what I have said before, because Senate Bill 1 is a rehash of the worst aspects of each previous version of Senate Bill 83.

We all know the only way to address the very real problem of liberal bias on campus is to hire more conservative and Republican faculty, but Senate Bill 1 admittedly does nothing to fund or hire more conservatives. Instead, it limits free speech, promotes grade inflation and threatens to silence or even eliminate the endangered species known as the conservative professor.

First, Senate Bill 1 is a dumpster fire that threatens to incinerate free speech on campus. No less than FIRE—the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education—has warned that Senate Bill 1 and the speech code it would impose on public universities is “unconstitutional” and “threatens academic freedoms”. When the premier conservative organization in support of free speech in higher education says “NO,” real conservatives vote “NO”! Would it not be very embarrassing to vote for a bill that is ultimately found to be an unconstitutional restriction on free speech? Would it not be wise to speak with FIRE and fix this issue?

Second, the institutions of tenure, unions and fair evaluations protect minority viewpoints, and we all know conservatives are in the tiniest minority on campus. Senate Bill 1 would allow a liberal dean or administrator to use two years of below average reviews in any category as a pretext to discipline or fire a conservative professor. Adding an appeal right is irrelevant. This will immediately silence our few remaining conservative faculty. Even worse, Senate Bill 1 prohibits any faculty from bargaining over post-tenure review. This means your dean or supervisor unilaterally creates your review system, reviews you under the system of their choosing, and then decides whether to fire you under the same arbitrary system. Professors of

all political stripes will shift their focus from educating students to pleasing everyone and protecting their jobs. Grade inflation is the inevitable result.

I sincerely believe the goal of Senate Bill 1 is to return intellectual diversity to Ohio's public colleges and universities. As a conservative who has dedicated his life to higher education, I have been fighting for this goal since I was a College Republican. With highest respect, I sincerely ask you to be deliberative and repair Senate Bill 1 before bringing it to a vote. Otherwise, true conservatives must remember the single, most beautiful word in the English language and vote "NO"!