

Testimony of Todd Lu, Ph. D Candidate at the University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair  
February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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

I will be joining Ohio faculty as an Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati and starting my position in August 2025. I am writing to ask you to reject Ohio SB1 because of its harm to labor protections of faculty and unprecedented interference in our teaching. I believe this will greatly and negatively impact the research and teaching competitiveness of Ohio public colleges and universities. The introduction and potential passage of these bills makes me seriously question my long-term career at the University of Cincinnati and in the case of passage, I would most likely seek out institutions in other states that are more respectful of and committed to university autonomy in faculty and student concerns.

I believe this would be a great loss for Ohio's research community and student bodies. As a PhD Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I have published in the top journals in my sub-fields and have been awarded competitive research grants on labor and workforce development considerations in the clean energy sectors. Moreover, I bring high quality teaching credentials having been the instructor of record undergraduate students in the past four years at my current institutions. Although I was very excited to bring my research, grant procurement, and teaching skills to the University of Cincinnati, Ohio's political interferences make me doubt my long-term career and success at this institution.

I also want to express my reservations for the definitions of "controversial beliefs or policies" in our classroom and bans on "diversity, equity, and inclusion" programs and scholarships. By requiring universities respond to any complaint on a "controversial belief or policy," this would create enormous administrative burdens and costs instead of prioritizing resources on universities' research, teaching, and community service programs. Instead of expanding "intellectual diversity," such policies would lead to instructors to avoid such topics in the classroom. I believe this leads to further coddling of undergraduate students and undermines their capacity to develop critical thinking skills. My concern on the "diversity, equity, and inclusion" bans are the lack of concrete definitions of DEI, the poor implementations of such rules, the further signaling to students that from multiple backgrounds (e.g. ranging

from students from Appalachia, 1<sup>st</sup> generation college students, students from different racial backgrounds, etc.) that they do not belong in Ohio public colleges and universities. As the language written now in the bill, I'm not sure what the Ohio legislature is trying to accomplish and am concerned about unanticipated negative consequences.

Finally, I want to highlight the immense cruelty of taking away tenure and worker protections among Ohio faculty. We enter the academy knowing that it is an immense sacrifice of our professional and personal lives and tenure is one of the few guaranteed protections for such competitive positions. For myself, I have spent eight years of my life living off a stipend ranging from \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year, which is typical of PhD programs. The academy is not perfect, but Ohio SB1 would further increase these financial barriers in ways that prevent even more financially precarious students and young scholars from being able to contribute their talents to high quality and socially important research programs at Ohio institutions.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Todd Lu', with a stylized, cursive script.

Todd Lu

Incoming Assistant Professor (start August 2025)

Department of Sociology

School of Environmental and Sustainability

University of Cincinnati