

Opponent Testimony for SB1
Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry C. Cirino, Primary Sponsor
For Testimony on February 11, 2025

Cynthia Nitz Ris, J.D., Ph.D., Professor, Educator
Personal Testimony

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Cynthia Nitz Ris and I am a Professor in the Educator track at University of Cincinnati where I have been teaching full-time since 2005 and where I received my graduate education. I am here to provide my personal testimony and to express my serious concern about how this bill sends a wrong and dangerous message about who our teachers are, who our students are, and why we purportedly need this bill.

I had the privilege to serve in a variety of roles at my University, including Chair of University Faculty where I worked alongside Administration, contributed to Board of Trustee meetings, and collaborated with staff, student, and decanal leadership. In all these capacities, I heard about the wonderful work our faculty were doing to represent our students and our University. I recently served as Interim Head of my large department where our main obligations are research, teaching, service, and professional development. While mine are not necessarily the views of the University, I do know that my colleagues across the University and I have many things in common, including being dedicated to our students, to their educational growth, and to their overall well-being.

As Interim Head, I participated in the annual review of faculty and in reappointment, promotion, and tenure reviews. What I saw was humbling. You would think from this Bill that anonymous student evaluations (that are received only after grades are submitted) would be replete with concerns about “indoctrination” or feeling as though their varied perspectives could not be heard. Quite the contrary. Students showered positive comments on their teachers; they reported a sense of belonging in the classroom, teachers who provided inspiration to be creative and innovative, and being challenged in an environment conducive to learning and practicing the content of the course.

Faculty across the University, often together with undergraduate and graduate students, produce news-worthy and award-winning findings in areas such as communication, science, law, and medicine. They represent their work locally and at national and international conferences. This excellence attracts quality faculty and students from around the globe. They work hand in hand with community members to help alleviate problems that beset all our communities.

However, this bill seems to suggest that we have no standards of excellence. It prohibits us from encouraging diverse groups of people to come to our universities who have only enhanced our knowledge base and served as a bridge to a wider range of communities. Despite our collective hours of education, continued professional development, on-the-job experience, and policies and practices already in place to ensure quality, we are being told that politicians, not educators, know best what it takes to reach and teach our students.

Ohio needs educational institutions that can continue to prepare trusted individuals, employees, professionals, and leaders of all kinds to contribute to our state and to the world. This bill only hinders us in that effort; let us do what we do best.