

Testimony of Amy Pratt, M.Ed, PhD.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 6, 2025

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

My name is Amy Pratt. I am a proud alumnus of The Ohio State University and a current professor at University of Cincinnati. I do not represent either institution, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

My testimony outlines three ways SB1 will hurt Ohio, our students, and our renowned public universities.

(1) Threatens accredited academic programs

I work in a department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, which means that I train the speech-language pathologists who treated your grandma after a stroke and who evaluated your child when they were slow to start talking. To be an SLP in Ohio you must have a master's degree from an accredited university. University of Cincinnati currently has over 150 MA students in our programs (do the math – that's a lot of tuition money). To achieve accreditation, universities must prove that we are training our students to treat patients from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This includes instruction about possible patients from Appalachia, whose dialect of English might flag as "disordered" to an untrained clinician.

It is unclear under SB1 whether I could speak freely in my courses about topics like: dialect, multilingualism, and cultural differences. It is unclear whether I could foster the important discussions about why this knowledge matters and how the failure to acquire it hurts vulnerable populations across Ohio.

(2) Threatens important research into health inequities

I am currently the principal or co-investigator of a grant from National Institutes of Health and the Department of Education that totals over \$2.5M. My research focuses on the identification of dyslexia in children who are multilingual. I have presented my findings at national and international conferences, including here in Ohio to our amazing educators at the Ohio Literacy Symposium.

Last week, I learned that my research was flagged after an internal investigation at UC into research that might promote DEI principles. The issue? My research uses the word "inequitable" to describe the finding that Ohio's Dyslexia Screening Law was misidentifying large numbers of English learners as having dyslexia. Let me be clear, I am a huge proponent of dyslexia screening and I commend lawmakers for passing that legislation. But the very reason we screen for disabilities like dyslexia is to (a) give students the extra support they deserve (i.e., **equity**) and (b) ensure that students receive that support in the least restrictive setting (i.e., **inclusion**).

Is the Ohio Legislature contradicting itself, and its Dyslexia Screening Law, when it bans offices, programs, and content that focuses on DEI?

(3) Leads to a “brain drain”

I happen to think I am a positive contributor to Ohio. My work is widely published. My research funds support me, project staff, and they pay student tuition. My student ratings are consistently high.

But please, please hear me when I say this: Professors like me will leave the state of Ohio (and take our research funding with us) if SB1 passes in its current form. Please think outside of Senator Cirino’s narrow thinking around this bill and consider the ramifications of a “brain drain.” Not only will our universities be less prestigious if we can’t attract top talent, but it also threatens industry in the state and it weakens our health care professionals (like speech-language pathologists) if we cannot recruit expert faculty to teach these courses.

I do not believe my work is controversial. I resent it being politicized as a weapon to divide us further.

Please oppose SB 1.