



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Improving Higher Education Through Accountability

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 1

Greg R. Lawson, Research Fellow
The Buckeye Institute

February 11, 2025

As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify on the policies—including in **Ohio Senate Bill 1**—to reshape Ohio’s higher education system to meet the needs of the 21st century.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

American higher education has long been the envy of the world. Unfortunately, rising tuition costs, administrative bloat, speech codes, and a lack of ideological, academic diversity have tarnished higher education’s reputation for adequately preparing the next generation. Many of these systemic or cultural problems will not be solved with policy changes overnight, but policy reforms can play a part, and Senate Bill 1 will help.

The bill, for example, reinforces support for the First Amendment by amending university mission statements to positively reaffirm a commitment to free and open intellectual inquiry, independent thought, and viewpoint diversity. The bill would eliminate **questionable mandatory** training on campus that smacks of **compelled speech** and has proven **ineffective and counterproductive** according to leading academics in the field. These and other reforms have become regrettably necessary as 80 percent of surveyed students **report** self-censoring, and professors and visiting lecturers are infamously **shouted down** or administratively **punished** for their opinions or allegedly violating campus “speech codes.” Such incidents erode taxpayer confidence that their public colleges and universities remain intellectually diverse and open to an honest exchange of ideas.

Senate Bill 1 would also improve faculty tenure policies by requiring robust post-tenure reviews. Tenure significantly benefits faculty and students insofar as it secures rigorous academic debate, intellectual inquiry, and independent research. But tenure can also protect staff who stifle academic inquiry and discussion, and it contributes to bloated payrolls by **failing to align financial incentives with job performance**. To improve tenure policies, the bill requires a post-tenure review for tenured faculty who receive a “*does not meet performance expectations*” evaluation within the same evaluated category for two out of three consecutive years. If done carefully and without infringing on academic freedom, such reviews could help keep faculty accountable and spur productivity. Alternatively, as Dr. Richard Vedder has **shown**, tenure could become an optional component of faculty compensation, allowing universities to pay more to those who *voluntarily* choose not to accept tenure’s protections.

Other notable improvements include disallowing public university faculty to strike, extending to public faculty the same **statutory negotiating procedures** that public safety and some public health workers use, and ensuring that course syllabi at public universities are transparent and publicly available.

These are timely steps in the right direction, but the General Assembly should take several more.

Ohio should also ensure that accrediting entities do not mandate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies as part of the accreditation process for state-funded universities. Although accrediting bodies, like the **Higher Learning Commission**, perform useful functions in overseeing the quality and standards of higher education institutions, they should not be allowed to circumvent reforms in Senate Bill 1, and they should be sanctioned if they do so.

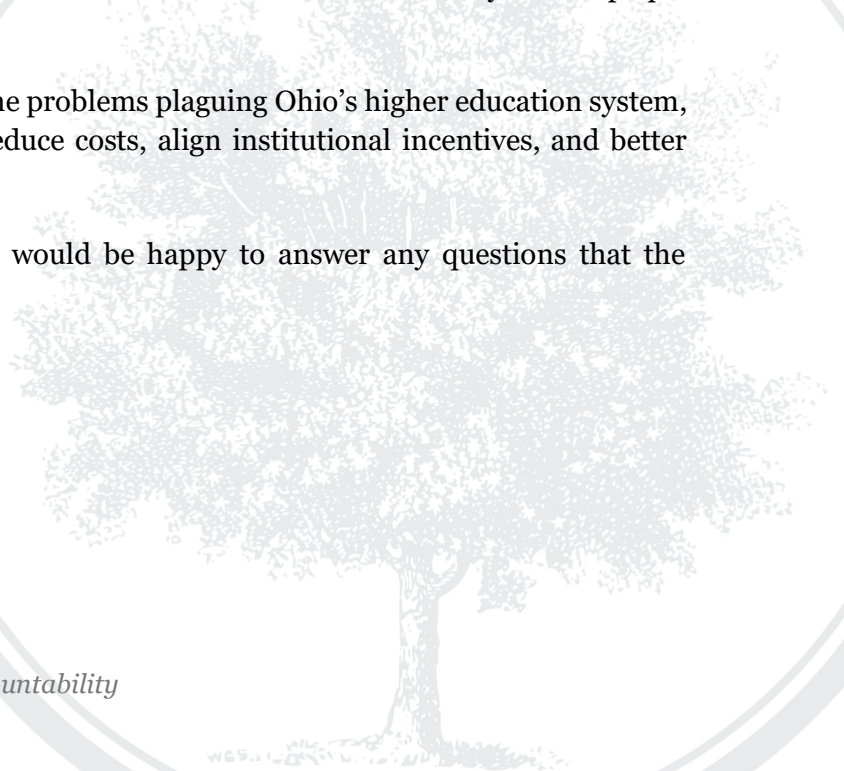
Ohio should cap the bloated administrative expenses at state universities that make college even more expensive for families and taxpayers, as **recommended** in The Buckeye Institute's report on higher education. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni **found** that from 2010 to 2018, the cost of noninstructional spending grew three times faster than in-classroom spending. The Ohio State University, to take just one **example**, had around 200 employees in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices alone, costing more than \$13 million per year as recently as 2023. Whatever their merits, these are not instructional positions to prepare and equip students to meet the challenges of the 21st-century workplace, but they do add to the tuition bill. Senate Bill 1 wisely eliminates explicit DEI roles, but policymakers should remain mindful of the pernicious ways these can be renamed and re-emerge. An overall administrative cap will make this less likely.

Additionally, if state-funded universities want to receive generous taxpayer support, the General Assembly should reasonably restrict university expenses. Schools that exceed those limits should see their state share of instruction (SSI) allocation reduced by an equal amount. As outlined in the recent Buckeye Institute **report**, Ohio should also align the SSI's two- and four-year state funding streams with better post-graduation outcomes, financially rewarding schools that graduate students with more manageable debt-to-earnings ratios and better workforce credentials.

A more dramatic reform would take a page from the school choice playbook and give vouchers directly to students rather than simply subsidizing colleges. Policymakers should not underestimate the transformative strength of a free market that empowers students and incentivizes universities to compete for students and state dollars rather than rely on an opaque and complex subsidy formula.

Senate Bill 1 should help address many of the problems plaguing Ohio's higher education system, but more remains to be done to further reduce costs, align institutional incentives, and better prepare our students for the future.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

The Buckeye Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit, and tax-exempt organization, as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code. As such, it relies on support from individuals, corporations, and foundations that share a commitment to individual liberty, free enterprise, personal responsibility, and limited government. The Buckeye Institute does not seek or accept government funding.

