

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signs higher ed bill that eliminates DEI, bans faculty strikes

By **Jessie Balmert**
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Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed a sweeping [higher education overhaul](#) on Friday to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion on campus, prevent faculty from striking and prohibit universities from weighing in on controversial topics.

Ohio's GOP-controlled Legislature quickly passed [Senate Bill 1](#) despite protests from students, professors and Democratic lawmakers. Backers of the bill say it's needed to prevent liberal, "woke" indoctrination on Ohio's public universities and community colleges.

"One of the goals of this bill is to make sure that we do everything that we can so that a student feels free to express their point of view, whether that be in a classroom or whether that be someplace else on campus," [DeWine said Wednesday at the Columbus Metropolitan Club](#). "That should be part of what we're doing in higher education."

Sen. Jerry Cirino, R-Kirtland, championed Senate Bill 1 and its predecessor. He called the new law "monumentally significant legislation that will allow Ohio's public universities and community colleges to deal with looming enrollment challenges and usher in a renaissance of academic excellence."

"As this plays out, critics will find out that their dire predictions are not going to come true," Cirino told the statehouse bureau after DeWine signed the legislation. "We're not going to lose massive numbers of students or faculty; it's actually going to be a very attractive place in Ohio for more students to come here from out of state, as well as promoting more students in state coming to our community colleges and universities."

Opponents say Senate Bill 1 will cause faculty and students to flee the Buckeye State. House Minority Leader Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington, said DeWine failed Ohioans by signing the bill.

"The governor now has to live with the consequences that will haunt his legacy because signing SB 1 into law begins the inevitable destruction of Ohio's cherished higher education system," Russo said. "It's Republican policies exactly like this that are ripping people off and failing to address the issues that matter most to working families."

Ohio's public universities and colleges must abide by the new rules or risk losing state funding. Among the changes:

- No training, offices or scholarships based on diversity, equity and inclusion. These programs, some of which are decades old, came under fire from Republicans, including President Donald Trump. They were set up to improve access to college for historically underrepresented groups.
- A ban on faculty strikes. The change adds faculty to the list of professions, such as prison guards and police officers, who may not strike.
- Tenured professors could be fired over poor reviews. Students and peers would weigh in on professors' performance, and poor evaluations could result in discipline or firing.
- Higher education institutions can't take positions on "controversial beliefs or policies," defined as anything subject to political controversy, including climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, DEI programs, immigration policy, marriage and abortion.
- Eliminate undergraduate degrees if fewer than five students obtain degrees over three years.
- A ban on donations from and partnerships with the Chinese government.
- A requirement that faculty post syllabi online starting with the 2026-2027 school year.
- A reduction in the tenure of university trustees, political appointees who oversee universities, from nine to six years. Ohio State University's student trustees may no longer vote on issues.

When does Senate Bill 1 take effect?

Most of the changes in Senate Bill 1 take effect 90 days after DeWine's signature.

Lawsuit? Referendum? What could happen next?

Ohioans have the option to put laws passed by legislators to a vote. But they must collect 248,092 signatures or 6% of the last governor's race total to get the issue on the ballot. That's a massive undertaking, which makes it unlikely.

Instead, various groups could sue to block a portion or all of Senate Bill 1. Opponents have raised legal concerns about whether the bill violates the First Amendment's right to free speech, if its language is too vague to be implemented effectively, and whether eliminating DEI scholarships would harm individuals who currently benefit from them.

"Senate Bill 1 is going to end up spending more time in the courthouse than it has in the statehouse," said Sara Kilpatrick, executive director of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors.

The NAACP and other civil rights groups sued the Trump administration over the president's executive order to end diversity, equity and inclusion at the federal level.

Freda Levenson, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, said: "We remain steadfast in our commitment to First Amendment rights and stand prepared to enforce them. This legislation is unconstitutional and cannot stand."

Cirino said many lawyers have been involved in the legislative process during the past two years, and the bill has undergone much legal input and review.

"We believe that the bill is on solid grounds," he said. "I realize a lot of organizations or individuals don't like the bill, but whether or not they have legal standing or a strong legal position is quite another story. If there's a challenge, we'll deal with it."