

Ohio colleges could lose state funding if they don't implement new higher-ed law, bill architect says

By **Laura Hancock**
Cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Colleges risk losing funding if they don't follow a new state law that seeks to limit liberal "indoctrination" of students, and those who don't like it can leave Ohio, a powerful state senator said Thursday.

"When we look at higher education appropriations, we're going to have appropriations tied to compliance with Senate Bill 1," state Sen. Jerry Cirino, a Kirtland Republican, said at the City Club of Cleveland. "We are not kidding around. This law will not be ignored. It will be welcomed and it will be implemented at our universities and community colleges."

Cirino is both the sponsor of [SB1](#) -- a higher-education overhaul that professors and students protested -- as well as the chairman of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, making him one of the chief authors of the state's two-year budget bill.

SB1 bans diversity, equity and inclusion, bars schools from taking positions on "controversial beliefs" and bans faculty strikes, among other provisions.

While some critics have warned that students and faculty will leave Ohio because of the bill, Cirino told the City Club "certainly, for some of them, that would be OK."

"I will help them pack now," Cirino said as some audience members laughed or expressed shock. "We're not going to see that."

Cirino defiantly defended his bill at the City Club as about 60 professors from Cleveland State University, Cuyahoga County Community College, Youngstown State University and other schools protested outside. They chanted and carried signs before and during the first half of Cirino's talk that said, "Jerry Cirino – F – Failed Ohio Students," "RIP Higher Ed, Killed by SB1," and "Protect Education, Repeal SB 1."

A group of professors at Youngstown State are gathering signatures in an attempt to put a repeal of SB 1 on the ballot, said Cryshanna Jackson, a YSU professor, who is leading the effort.

Gov. Mike DeWine signed SB1 into law on March 28 and it goes into effect June 27. The bill bans DEI, requires a demonstration of “intellectual diversity” for course approval, prohibits schools from taking positions on “controversial beliefs,” including “climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion.”

Faculty must encourage students to reach their own conclusions “on all controversial beliefs and shall not seek to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious point of view,” the bill states.

Critics say that students with extreme beliefs can derail classroom discussion and prevent professors from teaching course content if they want a debate. Cirino disagrees, using a student who denies the Holocaust as an example.

The professor “could take a few minutes, not a ton of time, and he can explain the preponderance of evidence that is out there that it did happen, and it was a terrible thing in humanity that happened,” he said.

Faculty would be prevented from striking under SB 1.

“I am not anti-union. I am not anti-labor,” Cirino said. “In private-sector companies, I dealt with the steel workers in Buffalo. I know how to co-exist with unions. What I do not (accept) is all is students having their education interrupted in the middle of the semester because a faculty union wants a better dental plan, or they want more sabbatical time, or whatever they might want.”

Cirino told the audience that his chamber is just starting its budget work, which will focus on education funding and economic development projects, including a potential state share in a \$2.4 billion stadium for the Cleveland Browns in Brook Park. The Senate also is going to consider “guardrails” for marijuana after voters legalized recreational marijuana for adults 21 and older in November 2023.

Cirino also took a shot at cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer in his talk, saying opinion content vilifying Republican state lawmakers has made it difficult for Northeast Ohio lawmakers to secure funding for the region.