

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler. I am a tenured, full professor of English at Texas State University, speaking as a private citizen. I grew up and earned my undergraduate degree in Ohio and did my graduate work in Wisconsin. Why, then, did I apply for a job at a university in a state where I had never been? It was a tenure-track job.

What do tenure and the promise of tenure mean to us? Please think about tenure in terms of a benefit. Nobody goes into university teaching and research expecting to get rich, whether someone is an English professor, a marketing professor, or a computer scientist. I am sure you understand why someone in any line of work would accept a lower-paying job that offered such benefits as health insurance and employer contributions to retirement accounts instead of a higher-paying job that did not. When a university offers a tenure-track job, it makes a promise to the candidate: "if you work for us for six years, and do consistently high-quality teaching, research, and service, and are endorsed by four levels of review committees and outside evaluators, you will earn the benefit of assured continuing employment and the freedom to conduct your research and teaching in a way you see fit as long as you do so in a professional and ethical manner." The typical candidate in my department has spent about a decade as a student and has written what is essentially a book to earn a doctorate. When the university advertises a tenure-track job it is offering a benefit that is what the candidate wants more than anything else in their work life: to continue to pursue their interests and share them with students and colleagues. We currently have nine junior faculty members in my department to whom we have made this promise. I served on the search committees for three of them. Each was one of about 125 qualified candidates for their job. When I say they were the best, I mean it: better than 124 other qualified candidates from all over the world. Similar numbers apply to our other six junior faculty members. Should SB 18 become law, all these outstanding scholars and teachers would be denied what they have been promised and what they have worked in good faith to achieve. Given their records, they can find tenure-track jobs outside of Texas and they will.

I have done my best work since I received tenure in 1989, and I am currently working on two major projects. Having served on college review committees and college and university research committees, I know that I am not the exception. Most tenured professors on my campus have active research agendas while educating thousands of undergraduate and graduate students. My nine junior colleagues have proven that they deserve no less. The same is true for our university. Please vote NO on SB 18.