

Testimony of Jessica A. Leveto, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair

May 15, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Higher Education Committee: My name is Jessica Leveto. I am a professor of Sociology at Kent State University at Ashtabula, where I have taught for ten years. I do not represent Kent State University at Ashtabula but am submitting testimony as a private citizen opposing House Bill 151.

I write today to voice my **opposition to House Bill 151**, a proposal that undermines the fundamental principles of academic freedom, limits intellectual curiosity, and impedes creative, social, and scientific innovation, collaboration, and social progress.

HB151 seeks to prohibit universities from opposing systematic racism, sexism, and discrimination based on LGBTQ+ status. This is not merely a constraint on academic freedom but an attack on the essential mission of our universities to foster a culture of respect and acceptance. Our institutions of higher learning have a moral obligation to challenge and reject all forms of bigotry and discrimination. By silencing this opposition, HB151 threatens to perpetuate harmful biases and deny the lived realities of underserved communities.

This bill prohibits universities from endorsing concepts such as allyship, social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. These are not mere ideological constructs to be censored but fundamental principles that form the bedrock of a democratic and pluralistic society. Allyship and social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not partisan issues but rather center the humanity in all, including those that may be different from us. **These values prepare our students to be responsible, empathetic, and engaged citizens in an increasingly diverse society and workforce.**

The bill forbids universities from endorsing any climate policies or the notion of a sustainable future. This is particularly alarming given the existential threats posed by climate change, an issue that is not merely political but a matter of scientific consensus and global urgency. Universities are centers of innovation, research, and dialogue about sustainable practices and policies. HB151 impedes our progress toward a more sustainable future by suppressing these discussions. **It undermines the critical role of academia in solving the world's most pressing challenges through collaboration, scientific rigor, and the pursuit of a just world.**

In conclusion, House Bill 151 prohibits universities as catalysts for societal progress, restricts academic freedom, and undermines the education of our scholars, significantly impacting the opportunities those students will have when they enter the workforce. We should be strengthening these commitments to provide our students with the most to be competitive in a global market rather than limit their preparation to engage in a complex, diverse world.

I strongly urge you to oppose HB151 and support the academic freedom of our universities, the rights of underserved communities, our collective responsibility to address climate change, and to prepare our students for a diverse workplace.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica A. Leveto

Jessica A. Leveto, Ph.D.
Conneaut, OH 44030