

Testimony of Tasha Perdue, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
May 15, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Tasha Perdue, and I am an assistant professor in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. I do not represent The Ohio State University but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in strong opposition to House Bill 151. This bill, if passed, would have a detrimental impact on students from underrepresented backgrounds.

As a white woman who is also a first-generation student from a working-class family in rural Ohio, I have personally benefited from DEI initiatives. My mother did not graduate from high school, but she instilled in me the importance of education. However, without DEI support for underrepresented students, I may not have had a chance to succeed. In particular, I have benefited from DEI initiatives including scholarships for my master's program, selection into four top PhD programs, hiring practices that consider DEI, and for selection into training programs for career development including the Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network. I continue to benefit from DEI initiatives as I am applying for a National Institutes of Health grant to address the overdose crisis here in Ohio. The grant is selective in that it is seeking to increase research from underrepresented scientists, including those from backgrounds like mine.


I am just one of many who have benefited from DEI. Many other students from underrepresented backgrounds have also been able to succeed in higher education as a result of DEI training and programs. House Bill 151 would have a detrimental impact on these students, many who face significant personal and professional obstacles to academic success. By limiting DEI initiatives, this bill would exacerbate existing inequities and further disadvantage those who are already marginalized. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just core values of democracy, but also essential components of a successful and equitable education system. By supporting students of all races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, religions, political beliefs, abilities, veteran status, and socioeconomic backgrounds, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all. Research has shown that diverse classrooms and campuses foster critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, and prepare students for success in an increasingly diverse and globalized world.

I fully agree with the importance of teaching students how to think critically and come to their own conclusions. I take great pride in fostering a classroom environment where students feel comfortable engaging in respectful debate and sharing their perspectives. I facilitate this environment by having my students collectively develop their own rules for class discussion, which are then revisited when discussing potentially polarizing issues. I recently reviewed my class evaluations to gauge student comments related to my efforts in promoting an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Among the evaluations, no students mentioned feeling like they

could not talk about their perspectives in class or that I supported certain viewpoints. Rather the students wrote that I discussed potentially divisive issues in an “*unbiased but academic way*” that their peers were “*open to converse about topics and were honest about viewpoints*” and that the format of the course allowed students to, “*think critically and independently through an inclusive environment*” and that students were “*encouraged to think for themselves and fully respect the opinion of others.*” My goal as an educator is not to dictate what my students should think but to expose them to new ideas and concepts while learning from their unique perspectives. I strongly believe that this approach is crucial in preparing students to become responsible and informed citizens who can think critically and make informed decisions.

While it is important to encourage open and respectful debate and ensure that all voices feel included in the classroom, House Bill 151 is not the answer. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tasha Perdue".

Tasha Perdue