

Testimony of Scott Schricker, Ph.D.  
Before the House Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
May 16, 2023

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

My name is Scott Schricker and I am a professor in the College of Dentistry at Ohio State University where I have taught for 22 years. I do not represent Ohio State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

Substitute House Bill 151 contains many provision that will dramatically and negatively impact higher education in Ohio. One of the most damaging aspects of this bill is the treatment of DEI concepts as something undesirable in higher education or society in general.

The language surrounding HB 151 and SB 83, suggests that DEI and sustainability are part of a leftist 'woke' movement that indoctrinates students and is antithetical to Ohio. However, a quick review of Fortune 500 companies based in Ohio tells a different story. There are 25 such companies and an additional 6 companies with a major presence in Ohio: Intel, Honda, GE, GM, Ford, Amazon that were examined. All but two companies had explicit DEI statements and all but three had explicit sustainability or climate goals. 13 of these companies specifically mention environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) as part of their mission.

The incorporation of DEI and sustainability into Ohio State's mission and practices is not a radical, or out of touch concept, HB 151 is. Ohio State is utilizing what is widely recognized as best practices around the state. We should always debate and examine our procedures and welcome anyone who disagrees. However, prohibiting the use of DEI and sustainability in our operations puts our institution, our students, and the state at a competitive disadvantage. One of the Governor's stated goals in the higher education budget is workforce development. We cannot adequately prepare our students to engage in the wider world if we do not model and teach best practices.

HB 151 also runs counter to many of the recent initiatives by the state of Ohio. In 2022, The Ohio State University received the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award, for our success in hiring people with disabilities. If we take language of the HB 151 at face value, the prohibition of inclusion in hiring practices would eliminate this initiative. Section 109.804 of the Ohio Code establishes a chief of police training course, renewed in 2023, that requires diversity training for newly appointed police chiefs. Passed in 2021, Section 122.87 created a minority business bonding program. Effective in 2021, Section 122.92 creates a minority business development division. Section 122.922 describes some of the goals of the program and uses the following definition:

“Social disadvantage based on any of the following: A rebuttable presumption when the business owner or owners demonstrate membership in a racial minority group or show personal disadvantage due to color, ethnic origin, gender, physical disability, long-term residence in an environment isolated from the mainstream of American society, location in an area of high unemployment.”

Section 124.91, effective in 2019 requires an annual survey on diversity within each state agency’s workforce. In addition to data, the survey from 2020, provides definitions of systematic and institutional bias. In the Administrative Services annual report from the 2022, it is noted that the State Human Resources Division (SHRD) won the DEI in the Workforce award from the National Association of State Chief Administrators. The Ohio Department of Development has a 2021-2023 diversity, equity and inclusion plan that includes an introduction from the Governor. This plan also contains definitions of systemic and institutional bias. Some of the headings in the plans goals include “Elimination of Institutional Bias Commitments” and “Cross-Collaboration in Policy to Eliminate Systemic Bias Commitment.” The value of this and all policy initiative should always be the subject of rigorous debate. However, it is clear that our institutions of higher education do not have DEI missions or goals that are radically different from other Ohio government agencies.

HB 151 does nothing to advance the mission of our public universities or the economic development of Ohio, quite the opposite. We chose to look forward. Diversity and inclusion is not a radical concept. It is part of the best practices of Ohio’s Businesses and Government and should remain part of the mission and operations of higher education.