

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ethan Nichols. I am a rising junior at Xavier University, majoring in Philosophy, Politics, and the Public and English. I am strongly opposed to HB 151 and its companion bill in the Ohio Senate.

This bill is dangerous. Academic environments are enhanced by diversity. It makes us stronger. At my own university, I have seen firsthand the benefits that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs have. Recognizing our diversity and differences helps to bring us together.

For those of you unaware, Xavier is a Jesuit Catholic university. Diversity is one of the key tenants of Jesuit teaching emphasized to us repeatedly throughout our time at the school.

A quote from the Xavier website reads: *“Diversity and the Jesuit tradition - A respect for all human persons and differences is a significant aspect of the history of the Society of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola befriended fellow students who were quite different from himself with regard to social class, age, and nationality rather unique in the 1500's.”*

Of the current student body at my university, 21% are students of color, representing 48 countries, practicing 15 different religions on campus. Xavier University has long been committed to DEI. We have numerous university offices representing and supporting diversity efforts. These include the Center for Diversity and Inclusion; Center for Faith and Justice; Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion; International Student and Scholar Services; TrIO scholars; and more.

In addition, we have a number of student clubs and organizations. The LGBTQ+ Alliance; Black Student Association; National Pan Hellenic Council fraternities and sororities; Asian & American Students in Action; HOLA, our LatinX awareness group; Irish Culture Club; Muslim Student Association; and more.

All of these clubs, organizations, and university offices would be affected by HB 151. These are spaces for students, faculty, and the wider community to engage in discussion and be in community. They are safe spaces, and they are necessary spaces.

In addition to the threat that this bill has to diversity programs on college campuses, it is a threat to freedom. The bill bans public statements on topics deemed “controversial,” and restricts discussions about race, sex, sexuality, gender identity, and other items deemed “controversial.” This is a direct affront to the type of free discussion and thought that college campuses are supposed to foster.

This bill is dangerous and should be voted down.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.

Yours,

Ethan Nichols