

SAY NO TO HOUSE BILL 151

Testimony by the Campaign for Our Shared Future

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee:

The Campaign for our Shared Future (COSF) is a nationwide campaign dedicated to ensuring every child gets an excellent education, inclusive of and accessible to all. At COSF, we share the General Assembly's goal to ensure all students have opportunities to weigh multiple perspectives, learn to think independently, and prepare for life in the real world. Despite changes, we strongly believe that House Bill (HB) 151 remains deeply flawed and poses a significant threat to our common goal. As written, this bill could cause untold harm to Ohio students and put them at a disadvantage in their careers and the real world.

HB 151 Censors Age-Relevant Education

Politicians should not get to decide which ideas are and are not appropriate for the classroom. Any attempt by politicians to censor ideas is un-American and poses a serious threat to student success and free expression. **We must teach students to lean into difficult conversations, not run away from them, as this will give them the independent thinking skills they need to be successful in the future.**

HB 151 Encourages Extremism

This bill defines "intellectual diversity" broadly, creating a slippery slope. Could Nazi propaganda and other hate speech fall under this definition of diverse ideas? Nothing in the bill prevents universities from bolstering hateful rhetoric to comply with new provisions. Worse still, HB 151 requires higher education institutions to discipline anyone who "interferes" with so-called intellectual diversity, opening the door to violating the first amendment rights of students who openly oppose hate speech on their campus. **Let's talk about the best education for our students instead of scoring political points.**

HB 151's Targeting of "Diversity and Inclusion" is un-American

The American Dream stands upon the notion that we are all equal, and young people learn to put that into practice in schools and in higher education. Yet HB 151 wraps that notion in red tape. **We need to learn from the past to forge a better future. Look at what we overcame to get to where we are today. This is what makes this country exceptional.**

HB 151 Impacts All Students

Despite changes, this still bill targets programs that support students "based on identities." This threatens programs such as Ohio State's Afrikan-American Farewell Celebration and other graduation ceremonies that recognize the accomplishments of a growing minority student population, some celebrating over 30 years of history (1). **Political targeting of graduation ceremonies for Black students amounts to bullying and prevents all students from having access to safe and inclusive learning environments.**

HB 151 Sows Division and Hatred

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and diversity statements are important because they foster a safe and inclusive atmosphere for ALL groups of people, regardless of their gender, race and ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, religions, cultures, ages, and sexual orientations. They are not political statements. Fear mongering about innocuous and necessary programs will sow division, confusion, and turmoil for Ohio's college students. **Our universities and colleges are about much more than helping students with personal achievement; they are about preparing people to work together to advance not just themselves, but society.**

HB 151 is Bad for Business

Diversity is increasingly a core value and commitment that companies prioritize. Companies understand that having diverse viewpoints at all levels of an organization improves financial results, organizational and team performance, innovation, and other areas of the business (2). By policing classroom speech on a wide range of topics labeled "controversial," and targeting inclusion programming, **this bill takes away students' opportunity to develop key life skills needed to become the future of Ohio's workforce.**

HB 151 Creates Red Tape

Simply put: this bill would shift money, time, and resources away from students and put it toward creating red tape. **We need to focus resources on helping students succeed, not creating more bureaucracy and wasting tax dollars.**

HB 151 Politicizes Education

We agree that educators of all stripes should teach students *how* to think, not *what* to think. However, this cannot be achieved through political overreach that creates confusion, division, and red tape. We ask you to say no to HB 151 and instead work collaboratively with families, students, and higher education institutions to ensure all of Ohio's young people have access to a high-quality, competitive education.

Sincerely,

Heather Harding

Executive Director of the Campaign for Our Shared Future

- (1) Kyle Meddles, "Afrikan American farewell celebration highlights 30 Years of excellence at Ohio state" *The Lantern*, April 21, 2022, <https://www.thelantern.com/2022/04/afrikan-american-farewell-celebration-highlights-30-years-of-excellence-at-ohio-state/>.
- (2) Vivian Hunt, Sara Prince, Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, and Kevin Dolan, *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*, McKinsey, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>