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House Higher Education Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
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RE: HB394 “state higher ed institution commitment to certain beliefs” - *oppositional testimony*

Dear Chair Rep. Young and respected Committee Members:

My name is Ari, and today I am speaking to you on behalf of myself and also as a representative of TransOhio, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the trans and allied communities in Ohio.

While introducing HB 394, Rep. Holmes cited Ohio’s “recent political climate” as motivation for this bill, stating that “concern is growing that employment, funding, promotion, certifications, and classroom evaluations in Ohio’s public higher education institutions are increasingly tied to demonstrated support for *specific* ideologies and political opinions.” I respectfully ask for clarity: which specific ideologies or political opinions are being forced upon others in higher ed?

As a trans woman, I fear I already know the implication: that my existence is seen as an ideological threat.

According to a 2022 study, approximately 64,900 individuals living, working, or studying in Ohio self-identify as transgender. I’ve been an Ohio resident for 4 years, and I recently received my Master’s in Astronomy at the Ohio State University.

I came to terms with my gender identity while in grad school, though this was something I struggled with for my entire life. There was nobody in the department who “turned me trans.” In fact, there was nobody in the department who was out as trans before me. In a space where careers are built off of networking and collaboration, I felt isolated and alone.

I bring this up because, in his response to questions from the committee, Rep. Holmes also stated his desire to, and I may be paraphrasing here, “get DEI out of math.” The truth is, we scientists are not floating brains that transmit pure ideas between one another. We are human beings, with all the strengths, weaknesses, and diversity of experience that brings. To better understand all aspects of your coworkers, and the blindspots of your own experiences, is to foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment, and, in the end, yields better science.



I am here to remind you that we are in a time where trans people's existence is viewed as inherently ideological, and simply asking people to respect trans identity is seen as an ideological imposition. A bill such as this one would protect those who wish to discriminate against trans people under the guise of "protecting their beliefs."

My fellow trans astronomers who are currently discovering new planets, or creating mathematical models of galaxies, scientists far more brilliant than I, are they not welcome in academia? What of the countless others who will take their talent elsewhere as Ohio becomes more hostile to them?

I ask you, members of the committee, to take into consideration the full context at which this bill is being presented under, and vote **NO** on HB 394.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We welcome further discussion.

Respectfully,
TransOhio Board of Directors