

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

Good Afternoon. My name is Jules Mae and I am a recent graduate from Wright State University. I received my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, and plan to one day receive a Doctorate. I currently work full-time in the field of Social Work, in which I do case management for homeless youth. I will be pursuing a Master's Degree in Social Work soon. I am writing to you because I strongly oppose Senate Bill 83 and its companion bill in the Ohio House.

Attending college was a life-changing experience for me. I took on leadership positions in the University's student organization Rainbow Alliance for LGBTQA students. I also worked extensive hours in the Culture and Identity Center on campus, where I worked hand-in-hand with both the Wright State and Dayton community to educate and advocate for diversity and inclusion practices. It would be easy to assume that I must have learned within a vacuum from being so inter-connected with culture and identity groups on campus, but that is far from the truth. Diversity followed me everywhere I went. When I worked for campus housing, I was able to connect and empathize with students, staff, faculty, and people from communities far and wide about their diverse experiences. Recognizing people's identities and lived experiences gave guests the chance to feel *safe* while living on campus, either for a short time or a long time.

Diversity, inclusion, and equity practices were essential elements in helping me to succeed academically, as well. I was able to connect with both peers and professors in a classroom. I gained communication skills, boundary-setting skills, and even patience as I was able to empathize in some way with everyone, even those who held different viewpoints. Because of diversity and inclusion practices, I felt comfortable and empowered to utilize the resources offered to me in a college setting. I was unafraid to approach my professors to ask for one-on-one time during office hours to better understand a simple concept, or to help expand my mind and stimulate deeper conversation. College helped me grow in ways I could never grow from K-12 schooling, and that's the whole point of college. Students pour thousands of dollars to seek this enrichment. Diversity, inclusion, and equity practices enabled me to maximize my time and money in college to grow professionally and academically.

To finish off, I would like to tell a story. It is a simple story but it has deeply affected my life ever since it happened. While in my 3rd year of college, I was responsible for managing the LGBTQA peer space within the Culture and Identity Center. Running that room was my pride and joy. I worked to make it a safe place for people to come study, socialize, get basic needs met, and even just rest. I will never forget the day in which two of my Black friends came in needing a band-aid. I had provided them with a band-aid according to the shade of their skin. They cried. I was confused about why it was such a big deal to have something as simple as a "Black" or "Brown" bandaid. A Band-Aid is just a Band-Aid. For them, though, it was a recognition and *appreciation* of their identity. They were grateful and had stated that nobody ever thought to have that for them growing up. They explained how everyday objects, materials, goods, and practices are made specifically for White people in mind. They reported being bullied and

“standing out from the crowd” as kids due to the color of their skin. Society was not made for or in mind of them. This stripped them of their sense of self-worth as a human being. A White person’s bandaid *highlighted* their “minority” status in a way that White kids never experienced. It was a label, a branding for them. It was an advertisement to the world that being white is the default and somehow everyone else’s importance is diminished. If you can take one second, please step into the shoes of your childhood self. Remember a time when you felt disconnected from others, maybe even outcasted. Now imagine a time when you felt included and like you belonged. How do you want others to feel? If something as simple as giving a brown bandaid to someone gives them the same sense of euphoria that YOU had at a time when you felt included, don’t you want to support that? Don’t you want to work to create a world in which feeling that euphoria of feeling included and like you belong is normal? Life is not a competition to see who gets to be the “most happy”. Inclusive practices will not make YOUR life worse. Lifting others up will not do anything to bring YOU down.

I greatly appreciate the time you took to read my testimony. I do hope you take it seriously when I say that enacting this bill would certainly take away peoples’ sense of safety, dignity, self-worth, identity, and happiness. Leave a legacy in which people remembered how much you loved, not how much you hated.

Thank you.