

Opponent Testimony for SB1
House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Submitted March 6, 2025

Kate Durso, Private Citizen
From Cincinnati, OH

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Kate Durso. I am a faculty member working in Ohio, and I am testifying today as a private citizen from Cincinnati to express my strong opposition to SB 1 and to urge you to vote against this harmful piece of legislation. While I have deep concerns about its impact on the wellbeing of students, I am particularly troubled by the profound negative effects this bill would have on Ohio's economy. If enacted, SB 1 will drive away students, educators, and businesses, leading to significant financial losses for the state.

Ohio's higher education institutions play a crucial role in the economy by attracting talent, employers, and innovation. However, SB 1's restrictive measures—such as banning most diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, undermining academic freedom, and eliminating certain academic partnerships—will significantly damage Ohio's reputation as a competitive and welcoming state for students and professionals alike.

The financial impact of SB 1 cannot be ignored. Colleges and universities contribute billions to Ohio's economy each year through tuition, research funding, and job creation. The elimination of key academic programs, coupled with restrictions on intellectual freedom, will discourage enrollment and reduce tuition revenue, forcing institutions to cut jobs and programs that serve as economic drivers in many communities.

Furthermore, by prohibiting DEI initiatives, Ohio risks losing out on corporate partnerships, as many companies prioritize diversity and inclusion in their business and hiring practices. If businesses perceive Ohio as regressive and unwelcoming, they may choose to relocate or expand elsewhere, costing the state valuable jobs and economic growth. In my professional role, I have already been in communication with large corporations that are limiting their contact with my university based on its anticipatory compliance with removing DEI initiatives and services.

At a time when Ohio should be strengthening its economy, SB 1 threatens to do the opposite. The legislation risks driving away talent, diminishing job opportunities, and discouraging investment in our state. I urge you to consider the economic ramifications of this bill and vote against it to protect Ohio's higher education system and the prosperity it brings to our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership and hope you will prioritize policies that support Ohio's long-term economic growth.